SCRIPT ANALYSIS AND CHOREOGRAPHY: A STUDY OF INTERRELATING SKILLS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... 2
Abstract ........................................................................................................................... 3
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................... 4
CHAPTER 2: HOW DO THE WORDS WORK? .......................................................... 15
CHAPTER 3: HOW DO THE STEPS WORK? ............................................................. 34
  BODY ....................................................................................................................... 35
  ENERGY ................................................................................................................... 37
  SPACE ...................................................................................................................... 37
  TIME ......................................................................................................................... 39
CHAPTER 4: ANALYZING CHOREOGRAPHY ........................................................ 46
CHAPTER 5: HOW ARE CHOREOGRAPHERS READING SCRIPTS, AND HOW IS THEIR CHOREOGRAPHY CRITICALLY EVALUATED? ........................................ 60
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY ............................................................................................ 87
APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHIES OF INTERVIEWED CHOREOGRAPHERS .......... 89
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ................................................................. 92
WORKS CITED ............................................................................................................. 94
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Abstract

by

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This treatise sets out to explore the ways in which script analysis and the development of choreography might interact, and what might be the benefits of this interaction. This research holds that without a full appreciation of how choreography functions within a script’s dramatic structure, time can be lost; moreover, potential creative solutions can remain unarticulated. Elements of script analysis are reviewed, as are basic choreographic principles, and methodologies for critically responding to choreography. In addition to considering what might be done in theory, this paper examines the reality of how choreographers read scripts, and how they and their collaborators critically respond to their choreography. To this end, four choreographers were interviewed for this research: Martha Clarke, Dianne McIntyre, Jerry Mitchell, and Lynne Taylor-Corbett. In addition, published accounts of choreographers and their work are cited.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

_Logic is what gives you the freedom to be dramatic, astonishing or whatever it is._

_-Patricia Birch (qtd. in Lodge 139)_

After I retired as a classical ballet dancer and began acting, my theater colleagues asked me to choreograph for musicals or for scenes in dramatic plays that required dance. I had had no formal choreographic training, and lacked any dramaturgical knowledge that might inform my creative process. After hours alone in a studio, blocking out patterns and steps with script and score, I would eventually be prepared for rehearsals but not without feeling exhausted and insecure.

My confidence began to improve, however, after I took a directing class at Case Western Reserve University, where I was introduced to script-reading techniques that facilitate a play’s staging. By relating my directing choices to this analytical process, I was able to evaluate the effectiveness of these directing choices as well as assess how they were resonating with the audience.

My new skills gave me self-assurance, and, as a result, I began to apply the same analysis to my subsequent choreographic assignments that involved a play script. An appreciation of the play and its structure gave me a form within in which I could explore choreographic choices. A deeper understanding of the script also facilitated communication with my collaborators.

One of my assignments was to co-choreograph the 2008 musical revue _Let Freedom Ring!_ at Ensemble Theatre in Cleveland, the success of which was reflected in favorable reviews and sold-out performances. During preproduction, the director, musical director, and playwrights discussed staging ideas with me and my co-choreographer.
Movement ideas were further evaluated in the studio where my co-choreographer and I openly critiqued and revised our work. I believe that the preproduction discussions and informal studio dialog enhanced the outcome and contributed to the show’s positive reception.

The improvements that I perceived in my choreography after script analysis and my interactions with this co-choreographer prompted me to ask two questions. Besides my personal anecdotes, in what ways can script analysis and the development of choreography interact, and what are the benefits of this interaction? Similarly, what methodologies exist for analyzing choreography, and what are the benefits of these analytical activities?

In short, this paper is not intended as a manual for how to study scripts, nor is it a treatise on how to choreograph. Nor is this paper’s focus upon theater or dance history. My research instead examines assessment tools, both for scripts and for choreography, as well as the potential impact of these tools on staging scripts.

The focus of this research can be further narrowed through the clarification of several key points of vocabulary used throughout the discussion. Eight terms are particularly germane to my discussion, and I define them here.

*script* – A script is what this study defines as a written blueprint comprising dialog and stage directions for a show to be performed live in front of an audience.

*script analysis* – Although scripts, such as plays, can be examined as literary or historic works, this paper focuses on script analysis that has the specific goal of producing a theatrical work for the stage. In this way, different
methods of reading scripts can be perceived as techniques in much the same way that classical ballet can be seen as a dance technique.

*dramatic text* – A dramatic text is what theater practitioners read and interpret on the page (Wallis and Shepherd 4). Wallis and Shepherd state that a dramatic text is “an implied theatrical production” that was not written to remain solely on the page as a literary work, but was created to come alive on stage through the labor of others, and, as such, the dramatic text is only one of the determining factors that influence the resulting *theatrical text* that the audience interprets (5).

*theatrical text* – A theatrical text is the performance that the audience “reads” and interprets on the stage (Wallis and Shepherd 4-5).

*dramaturgy* – Dramaturgy is a literary term encompassing both the composition of dramatic texts as well as the activities involved in staging them.

*choreography* – Choreography is defined as the movements, steps, and patterns that are often associated with composing a dance set to music (“Choreography,” Def. 2). It also connotes an orchestrated series of actions that lead up to an event (“Choreography,” Def. 4).

*choreographer* – A choreographer is someone who interprets a dramatic text when the text infers it can be interpreted, in part, with some form of heightened physicality, specialized movement skills, and/or artful and complex maneuvering of performers and stage elements in the performance space. A choreographer’s skills are not necessarily limited to
dance. Choreographers also specialize in areas such as stage combat, acrobatics, and aerial flying.

*design team* – A design team often consists of a director, lighting designer, sound designer, dramaturg, and sometimes, especially for musicals, a composer, choreographer, musical director, and musical dance arranger who arranges music especially for dance numbers.

In introducing two of the above basic terms – dramatic text, and theatrical text – a theme of duality has been informally introduced. Richard Hornby writes that this duality dates back to Aristotle who placed “spectacle,” meaning the staging of a play, last in his list of dramatic elements (73). For Aristotle, the written play was important and not necessarily its performance. Hornby also notes that Aristotle was a theorist, not a theater practitioner (40). He faults Aristotle for ranking and separating the play from its performance (74), but Hornby also criticizes theater practitioners who believe that intellectualism is the antithesis of creativity (6). Thus, the theme of duality extends from script versus performance to also include theory versus practice.

Similar to Hornby’s views, my opinion is that intellectual analysis and physical practice do not have to be considered separate activities but, instead, can be viewed as related functions in the creative process of developing choreography and staging scripts. Therefore, this research will reflect my beliefs and examine the work of dramatic and dance theorists, who, like Aristotle, may be primarily theorists or educators; however, it will also attempt to relate and compare these theories to the practices and attitudes of working choreographers, particularly those who are well-established in either non-profit concert dance or commercial theater.
In addition to citing published accounts, I interviewed four choreographers specifically for this research. These choreographers were chosen because of their multidisciplinary experience with text and movement, and because of the acclaim that their choreography has consistently earned. Their selection was also based on their differences from the other participants. The choreographers come from varied backgrounds, and the unique artistic sensibilities of each could potentially provide differing and layered points of view. The four interview participants are: Tony-nominated director/choreographer Lynne Taylor-Corbett; director and Tony-winning choreographer Jerry Mitchell; Guggenheim fellow, Broadway choreographer, and director Dianne McIntyre; and MacArthur Foundation Fellowship recipient and director/choreographer Martha Clarke. Their biographies can be found in Appendix A. Interview questions can be reviewed in Appendix B.

Martha Clarke danced for modern dance icon Anna Sokolow, when Clarke was 15. Clarke admits, “I knew that I liked [Sokolow’s] kind of high theatrics . . . I'm not interested in [an] intellectual approach to movement, I'm not interested in theory” (personal interview, 5 December 2008). Indeed Clarke’s thoughts reflect Sokolow’s who wrote, “I hate academics. I hate fixed ideas of what a thing should be . . . I don’t like imposing rules” (qtd. in Cohen 29). As evidenced by Sokolow’s and Clarke’s comments, the anti-intellectual attitude of theater practitioners that Hornby described can be even more pronounced in the dance world, where physical labor is at a premium and cerebral contemplation is often viewed as rather extraneous. Choreographer June Finch illustrates these values when she describes her classes with the renowned educator and mentor Bessie Schönberg. Finch recalls:
To me, it seemed the whole point was to get people to explore some specific area of movement in depth. And not only explore it in depth, but to come up with something inventive about it. And it was always, always, always, supposed to be movement that you had found in the studio preferably in a sweat, nothing that you had thought of. (qtd. in Nazzaro Noble 123)

Indeed, cerebral work is often believed to interfere with what Schönberg calls “kinesthetic thinking” (qtd. in Nazzaro Noble 122). Schönberg defines kinesthetic thinking in dance as “a kind of second-nature awareness that the elbow thinks, the knee thinks, the shoulder thinks, the sternum thinks, the tailbone thinks, and is much more reliable than the head in a given situation and for certain needs” (qtd. in Nazzaro Noble 122).

When working with directors and actors who are not trained to “think” with their muscles, choreographers can feel misunderstood. Clarke’s comments reflect these kinds of communication challenges. She admits:

Sometimes actors get frustrated with me because I don't analyze text and I don't sit with [a] dramaturg and yammer, yammer and yammer, I actually try it . . . I would find the picture that felt right for the line rather than endless sitting at the table and ruminating . . . some actors have found that very frustrating and then some have really taken off and love it and find it very liberating. And ultimately, this actor, who said he was frustrated . . . said he realized in the end, it was the same thing. It was just a [different] way of getting there. That he arrived at the same point he would have
arrived at having sat at the table for five more days. But he didn't quite trust the process. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

It is my contention that a dualistic point of view that separates body from mind, intuitive imagination from intellect, and script from performance can exacerbate communication problems. If intelligent and talented collaborators are not communicating well, then it stands to reason that they are not realizing the full benefits of each other’s talents, and, as a result, potentially good ideas are being lost. And it is, therefore, worth examining how the intellectual pursuit of analyzing scripts and critically responding to choreography can interrelate with the physical work and “kinesthetic thinking” of creating movement so that “intellectual” and “kinesthetic” thinking are not viewed as separate but, rather, as two necessary partners in the creative problem-solving process.

While good ideas are a valued commodity, so is time. In 1994, I observed a choreography workshop led by Bessie Schönberg at the University of Akron. What I remembered from these sessions was her simple statement that a choreographer should not waste anyone’s time, one’s collaborators’, dancers’, or the audience’s. One of the biggest challenges facing most theater practitioners is, of course, limited time, especially in professional and commercial environments where resources are closely budgeted.

The fact that time is scarce is a formidable challenge for many choreographers. By their nature, choreographers are unusually highly physical and disciplined people, with the mental and physical stamina to endlessly experiment and discover through a trial-and-error process. Creating through trial and error falls in line with what management consultant Betty Vandenbosch defines as an inductive approach to problem-solving, which she observes is heavily used in creative problem-solving (2-3). A lot of
information is collected to understand a problem, which is then mined to arrive at a solution. Compared to deductive reasoning as part of which a hypothesis is tested, inductive reasoning can lead to “a solid understanding of the situation . . . new insights. . . [and] broader systemic solutions. However . . . you can easily stray into irrelevant investigations and waste a great deal of time. You may never reach closure” (Vandenbosch 3).

In addition to not having enough time to creatively experiment, rehearsing performers of mixed skill levels can be challenging. Also, scenes that have complex choreography typically use more rehearsal time than scenes that have simply blocking and dialog. Often directors and actors are not prepared for how time-consuming creating choreography will be. This is because directors and actors are ordinarily handed a script that, for the most part, has been completed by the playwright. Playwrights usually don’t write with actors present in the room. It’s not typical to see actors hovering over the playwright’s desk as the playwright writes or revises the actors’ lines. However, this is how a choreographer works. A choreographer composes the “words” of a dance with the actors’ bodies. Lynn Taylor-Corbett explains:

You can't say, “Here, read this” off a page like you can music or text. So it's “text” that has to be, as you say, “written in the moment” and it is an ill-understood thing. In films that I've worked on, for instance, sometimes they don't even provide rehearsal time but that you have to tell them, “No, no, we need to make it up!” . . . it's just unbelievable, [an] unbelievable misunderstanding of the level of difficulty. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)
To meet these kinds of scheduling challenges, many choreographers spend hours analyzing the score and listening to the music that their choreography will be set to. But when relating their work to a script, do they devote the same focus and scrutiny to structure of the dramatic text that they do to a musical score? Some do, such as Broadway choreographer Patricia Birch who notes, “The first thing is, you don’t choreograph, at least I don’t. You see what the demands of the numbers are within the whole thing” (McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 117). Arguably, some choreographers have a creative process in which they prefer not to preplan their music or the script they work with. For instance, choreographer Merce Cunningham uses the element of chance as a creative tool to generate possibilities that were beyond his own imagination (Blom and Chaplin 117).

Not preplanning with music or a script can be compared to simply getting in the car without any driving directions and seeing where one winds up versus using MapQuest for directions. It might be fun to get lost and visit unplanned and surprising locations, but one can get to one’s destination a lot quicker if the directions are read ahead of time. Three factors influencing one’s decision to use MapQuest might be: how much time one has, one’s tolerance for getting lost, and who else is in the car that one has to please.

Some choreographers have been fortunate to have “gods” in the car when they first start out on the journey of their choreographic career. For instance, Broadway icon George Abbott directed several shows that choreographer Jerome Robbins first worked on, and Leonard Bernstein composed the music for Robbins’ first ballet *Fancy Free*. Patricia Birch worked on several Broadway shows with veteran director Hal Prince, and Jerry Mitchell assisted Broadway giants Jerome Robbins and Michael Bennett. Most
choreographers do not have a “god” in the car. When starting out, they often work with directors with limited abilities and experience, and choreograph with untrained actors.

However, more than the practical, rather unromantic issues of finding one’s way, getting along with one’s collaborators, and saving time, this paper will argue that there is greater potential for richer, more layered relationships between the work of theater collaborators if choreographers develop their skills in reading and interpreting scripts, and, equally important, if their design-team collaborators hone their critical response skills in order to understand choreography. Dramaturg David Ball writes:

If your reading of the script is good enough to reveal the tools, weapons, methods, advantages (and liabilities) provided by the playwright, then . . . are you ready to apply your theater training, your theater arts and crafts, your talent. Any other order of attack robs you of your main ally: the strength of the writer whose script you admire enough to stage. (95)

Similarly, a choreographer’s collaborators should have basic critical response skills to fully mine the talents of the choreographer whom they entrust with what sometimes results in a considerable amount of staging.

With any creative endeavor, there is plenty of opposition to regimenting its execution. For example, theater pedagogue Jaques Lecoq, who emphasized physical preparation of the actor’s body, warned that training in a specific codified technique stunts growth and cuts down on the ability to be open and inventive in the moment (Murray 53). And Schönberg cautioned that “one cannot teach choreography” (qtd. in Nazzaro Noble 125). Finding a consensus on how theater artists should learn and execute their craft is a formidable challenge, and the purpose here is not to try to validate any one
technique, or to promote orthodoxy, but, rather, to explore whether there is common ground in different methodologies and devices, and how these structures can inform each other.

In this light, Chapter 2 includes contributions from theater educators and scholars who have written comprehensive methodologies for analyzing dramatic texts, and the aim of Chapter 2 is not to rewrite or redefine these efforts. The purpose, instead, is to lay the groundwork for the interaction of these script-reading techniques with a choreographer’s interpretation of dramatic texts. Similarly, Chapter 3 looks at basic components of choreography, the fundamentals of movement, and common compositional structures in order to provide vocabulary to enrich and articulate the disciplined critical response techniques that are reviewed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 summarizes and assesses the responses from interviewees whom I specifically interviewed for my research. Their responses are also augmented with related testimonies from previously published accounts. The evidence in Chapter 5 is not presented as conclusive; it is, instead, put forth as a point from which to begin a discussion.
CHAPTER 2: HOW DO THE WORDS WORK?

_I confess that my methods are instinctual. I didn't go to college. I never heard about any methodology and have been bridging the gap ever since._

-Lynne Taylor-Corbett (personal email communication, 27 September 2008)

A study of the interrelationship between script analysis and choreography would be incomplete without understanding what script analysis is and how it works. This chapter looks at methods for reading scripts and the analytical tools inherent in these methods.

The research monographs studied for this discussion were published during the past forty years. One thing that they all have in common is that they break a script down into manageable parts and suggest multiple readings, each of which focuses on one or more of these parts. For example, when a director/choreographer begins to work on a script, Pritner and Walters advise reading the entire play in one sitting and recording first impressions. These impressions are relevant in that they may be the only opportunity that the reader will have to innocently experience the content in a way similar to the experience of the audience, who will also be new to it. Taylor-Corbett contrasts her intuitive personal response of her initial read through to the in-depth intellectual understanding that she eventually has to reach. She discusses:

The first time . . . you just kind of read it for the chronology, what's going to happen next and what's the point of this piece? I mean, it's completely and totally subjective and personal. However, I think, in a later phase when you really develop the blocking, you do have to intellectually justify
it and you do have to reach a point where you are needing to be able to say to an actor, this is why you do that. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

Taylor-Corbett’s comment alludes to how a solid command of the script builds confidence as well as how her understanding comes into play even at the detailed level of coaching an actor through a particular blocking sequence.

Compared to notions of intuition, artistry, and instinct, the concept of breaking a complex play down into manageable, related parts can seem rather utilitarian, and, indeed, compares to some business management theories. What dramaturg Richard Hornby writes about a play, that it “can only be understood as an interconnected whole” (77), sounds much like a business organization in that it also is a complex, interconnected whole. Vandenbosch writes that, in order to foster problem solving that is both creative and practical, one has “to start from where the organization is starting, not from where you are or where you would like the organization to end up” and that one has to relate back to an “understanding of the [organization’s] situation and its constraints” (8).

Broadway director/choreographer Jerome Robbins is probably one of the best examples of a choreographer who had an extraordinary understanding of the whole. Historian Robert Emmet Long quotes critic Frank Rich who observed, “Robbins and his collaborators . . . [made the musical Gypsy into ] an organic entity—in which book, score, and staging merged into a single, unflagging dramatic force” (248). Long then compares Robbins’s work to that of director/choreographer Michael Bennett by noting, “Bennett’s stagecraft depends on its kinetic energy on spectacle, on a sweeping and exceptional mastery of technology of the theater, whereas Robbins’s dance imagination is so
profound that he can dispense with the big effects of technology, drawing his magic instead from the human form set into motion” (248).

While breaking a script down into manageable, related parts is common to most methodologies researched for this study, a second aspect that these methodologies all stress is the need to define a plot’s dramatic conflict. Underscoring this, David Ball observes that one of the rare things that theater practitioners can agree on is that drama is conflict (25). Conflict can be studied from several angles. For instance, David Ball takes a micro view from inside the world of the play and its characters. He restricts conflict to four types: “Me against myself,” “Me against other individuals,” “Me against society,” and “Me against fate, or the universe, or natural forces, or God or the gods” (30-31).

Wallis and Shepherd, on the other hand, take a macro view, historically contextualizing their discussion. The term for the main character in a play, protagonist, is based on the Greek word agonist meaning both “actor’ or ‘combatant’” (Wallis and Shepherd 102-103). For this reason, Wallis and Shepherd argue that acting, then, connotes struggle more than it does impersonation (103). They argue that dramas struggle with differences and contradictions not just between characters, but between ideas and beliefs (103). Because of the dynamics intrinsic to this sense of opposition, Wallis and Shepherd describe plays as “dynamic art works, things that are moving because they are on the move” (103).

Another way to consider the element of conflict is to study the questions that dramatic conflict poses. In many plays, the audience’s attention is maintained via unanswered questions about what will happen to the protagonist next. The protagonist has an overall objective, which the renowned director and pedagogue Stanislavski coined
the “super objective” (271). Conflict increases when opposing forces, such as character flaws or other characters, stand in the way of the protagonist achieving this objective (Pritner and Walters 59). Pritner and Walters organize their methodology around questions that are inherent in “conflict-resolution structure” (58). In their approach, the “major dramatic question” should be articulated for the entire play, for each scene, and for each individual action unit in the scene (62). The major dramatic question of the play is resolved at the climax. Identifying major dramatic questions should give theater practitioners insight into how their audiences will be engaged. The search for answers to these questions should entice an audience enough to motivate them to sort through what is often a lot of layered information and details.

David Ball has a slightly different way of thinking about conflict-resolution structure. Instead of focusing on questions, he uses the metaphor of “a series of dominoes” to illustrate his approach (13). He advocates tracing from beginning to end, how one conflict-resolution unit causes the next one to escalate. He also advises tracing these events in reverse order from the play’s end in order to reveal what is “required” to make the dominoes fall (15). This reflects Hornby’s thinking about the interconnected whole, whereby every element traces back to events that came before and also relates to events that have not yet happened (62). Choreographer Pat Birch has learned the importance of thoroughly understanding how the resolution of one event causes the next one to happen through the school of hard knocks. Consequently, she advises:

Take a very fierce look at what’s happening before the number, to set it up, and what’s happening afterwards. That’s rule number one, made after having stubbed my toe, redoing numbers five or six times out of some
feeling of inadequacy, and then suddenly turning around and saying, “Wait a second, this is not servicing the moment”. (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 117)

An example of a “domino series” can be found in the musical *She Loves Me*. George and Amalia are about to experience a blind date that will have the worst possible outcome. The production number “A Romantic Atmosphere” takes place in the restaurant directly before they both arrive on the scene. The audience should collectively inhale when Amalia anxiously enters the restaurant, if this musical number is staged with near pandemonium; the bus boy has dropped his tray, and the customers’ romantic intrigues have been comically disrupted. The momentum, heightened kinesthetic energy, and emotional involvement resulting from the chaos are arguably necessary to increase the audience’s empathy with Amalia’s disappointment, and carry them through to the heartbreaking ballad “Dear Friend” that closes the first act.

The director William Ball\(^1\) proposes yet another way to frame conflict. According to W. Ball, there are five predominant dramatic elements to choose from: *theme, plot, character, spectacle, and language* (27-28). Most dramatic texts have a mixture of these, but he argues that only one element should be emphasized, with possibly a secondary one receiving focus (27).

The predominant element can be translated into a major dramatic question that is theme-based, plot-based, character-based, spectacle-based, or language-based. For instance, *Gypsy* can be thought of as a character-driven musical that is, perhaps, fuelled by the question, “Will Rose find affirmation?” A different kind of question can be

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\(^1\) William Ball and David Ball are occasionally mistaken for one another because they share the same last name and both are well-known theater practitioners.
illustrated in the 1947 musical *High Button Shoes*. Historical accounts attest to the brilliance of Robbins’s second act opening number “Chase Ballet—à la Movies of 1913” (Jowitt 132). The lead character and conman Floy, beach bathers, Keystone cops, gangsters, and a gorilla all dash after a money bag in a madcap race. The intricately orchestrated mayhem cleverly ends with the loot flying into Floy’s lap (Jowitt 132-133). The spectacle-based question that drove the conflict might have been “Will Floy get away with the money bag?”

The importance of understanding conflict-resolution structure is underlined by the many viewpoints that have been expressed on the matter, several of which have been discussed. How conflict unfolds and how it is communicated to the audience takes many forms. Thus, another significant aspect of script analysis is appreciation of and planning for how an audience might emotionally and intellectually invest in a theatrical text. As scholar Mary Jo Lodge writes, the audience is a theater practitioner’s “final collaborator” (257). There are many ways to study audience expectations and how audiences might be engaged with a theatrical text. This examination will look at the functions of conventions, theatrical contracts, and exposition.

Wallis and Shepherd focus on recognizing what conventions may be at play in a dramatic text. They write that, for audiences, there are old conventions that seem outdated, contemporary conventions that are camouflaged due to their conformity with presently held values, and new ones that can astound and shock them (10). To illustrate, choreographer Jerry Mitchell used an understanding of conventions to communicate meaning. He used a Vaudevillian convention known as “in-one-number” in the sixties-inspired musical *Hairspray*. “In-one-number” refers to a musical number being sung or
danced in front of a theater’s stage curtains while scenery behind the curtains is rapidly
being changed. Mitchell staged a husband-wife love duet for actors Dick Latessa and
Harvey Feinstein who performed the role of Edna in drag. Mitchell explains how it
worked:

"As actors Harvey believed that Dick was his husband and Dick believed
that Harvey was his wife. So . . . he's trying to cheer his wife up [by
singing] “You're Timeless to Me” . . . The “in-one-number” is pretty much
a dinosaur in the theater these days . . . even though we brought the curtain
in and pretended to do an in--one-number, we really weren't changing any
scenery back there. Because it's “You're Timeless to Me”; I wanted to pay
homage to a time when things were simpler . . . there were a number of
levels it was working on. (telephone interview)

Instead of theatrical conventions, Pritner and Walters focus, instead, on “theatrical
contracts.” For Pritner and Walters, this typically unspoken “contract” between the
audience and theatrical text is usually set up within the first few minutes of the
performance. The “contract” defines how the audience will engage with the theatrical text
and also provides guidelines for how the world of the play should be interpreted (34).
Pritner and Walters limit the types of contracts to presentational versus representational,
and realistic versus non-realistic (35). If even only one character acknowledges the
audience, then a play is presentational. Otherwise, there is an invisible "fourth wall,”
which typifies representational plays, that separates performers and audience (36).
Choreographer Michael Bennett used different vocabulary to express almost the same
concept. He labeled a presentational show a “hot musical” and believed that involving the
audience through direct address impacted them more emotionally. An example is *A Chorus Line*, in which auditioning dancers talk to an unseen director who is imaginarily placed somewhere in the audience. Bennett labeled a show a “cool musical” when a fourth wall existed between audience and performers (Challender qtd. in Long 247).

Pritner and Walters also point out that each play exists somewhere on a continuum from abstract to realistic (39). Theatrical texts may try to closely mimic life as we experience it or they may make no attempt to be realistic, and, instead, present mere abstractions. The dramatic text has many clues as to where the theatrical text will eventually fall on this continuum.

How and when the audience gets the information that they need to enter into the world of the play and follow the story is determined by what David Ball calls exposition. Pritner and Walters call information about the world of the play “given circumstances,” a term that they borrow from Stanislavski (21). They suggest four overlapping categories: things that happen before the story starts, the present time and location, “social systems . . . within which the play is set,” and “cultural norms” (21). A given circumstance is restricted to anything that is alluded to in a script’s dialog or stage directions. The more a given circumstance affects a character’s actions and attitudes as well as the conflict-resolution structure, the more gravity it carries.

Another major focus for many dramaturgs is character analysis. David Ball writes that “Scripts contain bones, not people” (61). Rather than detailed descriptions that flesh out people as in, say, novels, characters in plays are, instead, defined not so much by words but by what they do and why they do it. Stanislavski terms what a character does as their action and why they do it as their objective. Hornby claims that these concepts
are Stanislavski’s “greatest contribution to acting theory” (44) because they merge physical action with the spoken word. What characters do – their actions and motives – are often guiding choices for dramatic choreography, not only in the choice of the steps themselves but also in how the performers are coached.

Pritner and Walters provide a detailed attribute checklist with which to find clues about how characters are written. In addition to studying how a character speaks and behaves, their approach emphasizes understanding relationships between one character and another as well as between a character and their given circumstances. Pritner and Walters also scrutinize how characters behave at different points in the conflict-resolution structure (57).

How characters are shaped by their given circumstances and how they behave at different points on the conflict-resolution structure are illustrated in an anecdote shared by Mitchell about his experiences working on the musical comedy *The Full Monty*. A remake of the film of the same name, the show follows a group of unemployed working-class men as they learn to dance for a striptease show, the admission proceeds of which should earn them some desperately needed cash. When drafting the book, playwright Terrance McNally followed the film’s plot with stage directions that called for the factory workers to learn how to dance by watching a video of *Flashdance*. Mitchell attempted to choreograph the number as directed, but recognized that what was set for *FlashDance* was too virtuosic and intricate to be believably followed by these men in their given circumstances. These men were physically unconditioned, and had most likely never danced. In addition, they were trying to learn *FlashDance*’s choreography, which was conceived for a college ballet audition. In order to move the story line forward, the men
had to demonstrate some kind of mastery; however, if they assimilated any of the vocabulary from *Flashdance*, it seemed out of character and out of place. Working off composer David Yazbek’s song “Michael Jordan's Ball,” which had been written for another place in the script, Mitchell adjusted the concept. He relates:

[My solution] was . . . pretending to play a pick-up game of basketball. . . and have those moves translate into them finally picking it up and moving in sync and looking like a team of dancers-ball players . . . I played basketball my whole life, I understood the game, inside and out, my brothers play basketball and I understood the regular guy who takes those moves and tries to translate them now into stripper moves or . . . *The Full Monty* moves. . . . if these guys do a pirouette in the opening number, we're sunk. They . . . have to look like my brother looks when he goes on the dance floor . . . (telephone interview).

Mitchell understood that the basketball game expressed the given circumstances and behavior of the working-class men. Moreover, the game also helped to establish conflict and opposing forces because the men would have to miraculously transform from clumsy basketball players into seductive entertainers.

Character, given circumstances, conflict resolution, and audience expectations cover four fundamental areas of script analysis. How effectively these are woven together in a script depends heavily, of course, on the playwright’s skill. There are devices of dramatist craft that are worth reviewing because learning to recognize them can help unleash the power of the writing into the effectiveness of its staging. David Ball examines several of these, and two will be discussed here: theatricality and images.
“Things theatrical are all things that elicit strong audience response,” asserts Ball (35). Because of its inherent high kinesthetic energy, dance is frequently used as a theatrical device directly before the protagonist’s moment of engagement or climax. For instance, there is a well-used musical play convention called the “eleven o’clock number,” which is a high-energy splashy production number that is supposed to heighten emotions just before the climax (Peithman and Offen 10). In non-musicals, there are many more examples, such as the ballroom scene in *Romeo and Juliet* when the protagonists begin their ill-fated romance.

David Ball also discusses images, which can convey a rich mixture of associations and layered meanings (68). Often a play’s title contains an image that is a unifying metaphor for the entire world of the play (D. Ball 71): for example, the fragility suggested in Tennessee William’s *The Glass Menagerie* (D. Ball 72). Choreographers are frequently drawn to a play’s images, and often create choreography to illuminate them. Because this chapter focuses more on scripts than choreographers, an in-depth discussion of choreographers’ work with images will be deferred until Chapter 5.

What can be closely related to the imagery found in a play’s language is what director W. Ball identifies as a unifying metaphor. For him, this is often a visual image that all elements – sets, costumes, sound, etc. – must relate to. He believes that the restrictiveness of one metaphor or image can provide “clarity”, “unity”, and “punch” (36). Historian Robert Emmet Long writes that a unifying visual metaphor was a hallmark of Broadway director/choreographer Gower Champion’s work. Long described this as “a staging concept that summarizes or embodies the action taking place within it—the environmental carnival set in *Carnival!* the bedroom evoking a universal marital
experience in *I Do! I Do!*, the all-encompassing Broadway theater in *42nd Street*” (219). Again, visual imagery strongly influences the creative process of many choreographers, the evidence of which will be laid out in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The strategy of synthesizing all theatrical elements into one unifying metaphor, one overriding major dramatic question, or one predominant element can be said to follow a deductive reasoning pattern. Deductive reasoning relies on testing a hypothesized solution. Vandenbosch believes that the use of hypotheses is very evident in how most people “naturally” solve problems in their “daily lives” (67). She writes, “When we are faced with a choice about which data to collect to solve a problems or make a decision, we tend to hypothesize about what the right answer might be and then collect data to test that hypothesis” (67). When using deductive reasoning, choreographers and directors might primarily base their data collection from analyzing the script, outside research, previous experience, and intuition.

Robbins was known for his insistence on this kind of unity, and for this kind of reasoning. *Fiddler on the Roof* composer Sheldon Harnick recalled that Robbins “was like the world’s greatest district attorney, asking us question after question, probing—‘What’s this show about?’ —and not being satisfied with the glib answers we were giving” (qtd. in Jowitt 353). *Fiddler on the Roof*’s opening production number “Tradition” embodied the theme of “tradition and its erosion,” and Harnick reminisces that Robbins “would say again and again, ‘Well, if that’s what the show is about, why isn’t it in *this* scene? Why isn’t it in *that* scene? Why don’t we see it in *this* character or *that* character?’” (354).
Vandenbosch writes that, with deductive reasoning, “You are much less likely to collect data you don’t need, and you will usually arrive at a solution quickly”; however, “new insights” and innovation can be sacrificed for efficiency, and that the “outcomes maybe self-fulfilling” (3). For example, Robbins’ production of Bertolt Brecht’s Mother Courage was criticized for being too orderly. The Village Voice critic Michael Smith wrote that although “[m]uch of the production’s detail is exquisitely crafted[,] . . . [e]verything is insistently deliberate and implacable . . . The production seems continually to be judging itself” (Jowitt 339). This compulsive meticulousness is illustrated with an anecdote in which Robbins disapproved of an actor’s sweaty armpits and asked him to wear antiperspirant even though the actor was playing a soldier at war (Jowitt 337). Robbins apparently missed the point that Brecht’s aesthetic embraced earthiness and mess (Jowitt 337). Returning to the map analogy, Robbins might have had the route so mapped out and was so determined to follow his route that he may have missed some of the best scenery that was off the beaten path.

There are many questions that theater practitioners address when studying scripts. One that particularly interests choreographers, and has not been addressed yet, is when might movement be the most effective means of expression when staging a dramatic text?

Occasionally dance and movement are explicitly indicated in dialog and stage directions. However, for new work, choreographers collaborate with writers, composers, and directors to determine where movement might be used, and the writing and music can be adjusted accordingly. Director/choreographer Joe Layton described these movement moments as, “Things that dance themselves” (McLee Grody and Daniels
Layton said that choreography takes on more weight when it is integrated with a musical’s characters and their given circumstances, and he credited Robbins as an innovator who wove movement into the fabric of a show. Layton said, “When *West Side Story* starts, the concept is all about an ethnic group that dances. It’s their freedom, it’s their feeling. When they couldn’t say a word, they could certainly dance” (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 56). Murray writes that the body can contain and embrace “traces of its own history. . .personal biography, the marks of suffering or happiness, and the imprint of class, gender, race and all those other characteristics and dispositions that make us who we are” (39). Murray, among others, argues that some of the theater produced by black, gay, or female theater artists highlights the body and gesture because it can “investigate the unspoken, the forgotten and the silenced, thus bringing marginalized or hitherto excluded experience to the foreground of the performance arena” (39-40). Even though *West Side Story* was produced for mainstream commercial theater, Layton did articulate the metaphor of the stifled voice and pinpointed that the strongest way that the underprivileged Latino gang communicates and self-identifies is through their physicality.

A different example of highly expressive movement can be found in Tommy Tune’s *Grand Hotel*. The ailing, aged Kringelein tastes life for the first time as he joins a Charleston dance, legs and arms out of control in his excitement. Historian Long describes this moment, “Kringelein’s euphoria could not have been conveyed as well through dialog. . .It is hardly recognizable as a dance number, is an integral part of the movement of the production” (267). Even without witnessing Tune’s staging, one can imagine the incongruous image of a fatally ill, bookish accountant joyously frolicking
like a child, his unlikely discovery of love easing his yoke of mortality. Scholar and choreographer Lisa Jo Sagolla singles out the “principles of movement and effort” as one of four features of movement that can render it more powerful than spoken word or music (125). Citing the work of theorist Rudolph Laban who broke movement down into qualities that could be applied to dramatic situations, Sagolla alludes to movement’s ability to express contradiction simultaneously (127).

Martha Clarke’s work often expresses contradictory emotional and action states through movement. *Kaos, Garden of Earthly Delights,* and *Vienna: LustHaus* are works that create imaginary worlds that can blend dialog, sound, movement, and images that are framed by the expressions “of her own subconscious” (Bartow 51). Clarke describes her brand of physical theater as “a mongrel art form about contradictions and extreme emotions” (qtd. in Bartow 55). Her comment suggests that heightened physicality can bring characters that are engulfed in highly charged emotional circumstances to life. Clarke has credited Milan Kundra’s style of writing as influencing her work. She singles out Kundra’s *The Art of the Novel,* and quotes him, “Harsh juxtapositions instead of transitions, repetition instead of variation and always head straight for the heart of things” (qtd. in Bartow 57). Her viewpoint advances the notion that movement can convey the ambiguity and perplexing contradictions that define human behavior through juxtapositions of kinesthetic, visual, and aural elements. Theories in theater semiotics, or how theatrical texts can be studied as systems of signs and codes that produce meaning, suggest that spoken word or language has a narrower range of interpretation than, say, that associated with music and color (Whitmore 10). Whitmore notes that the meanings found in color and music can be informed more by the background of the viewer than the
intrinsic meaning of the music or color itself (10). I believe that movement, dance, and gesture can also be subject to a wider range of interpretation than text, and can also be more influenced by the viewer’s experience.

In addition to “principles of movement and effort,” Sagolla recognizes three other features of dance that interweave with the functions of a dramatic text that, for certain moments, make it more effective than music or spoken word: “movement as a universal language”, “motion through time”, and “kinesthetic communication” (2). Sagolla’s identification of the effectiveness of the universality of movement and gesture and is echoed by choreographer Twyla Tharp whose contract with her audience is “to connect them to universal emotions and ancestral impulses through dance” (146). Tharp writes, “What movement lacks in specificity it more than makes up for in primal power” (145).

Dianne McIntyre came to understand this advantage when researching for Jonathan Demme’s 1998 film Beloved, which was based on Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. Although McIntyre’s analysis was for a screenplay, the dramatic principles were the same as they would have been for dramatic text. She choreographed a scene that took place in Cincinnati, Ohio where freed slaves prayed and danced ecstatically in a ceremony. Cincinnati is located just on the other side of the Ohio River from Kentucky where slavery was still in effect, and the proximity to this border was highly significant to the story on many levels. From reading the script and the novel, McIntyre understood that the participants were from somewhere and nowhere simultaneously, their dancing was not stereotypical but yet somehow universal in its simultaneous conveyance of isolation, community, and rawness that might be found in diaspora narratives. It had to be unique to this isolated group. McIntyre explains:
The people were not from Africa but it was back in the 1800s so they may have had a parent that was from Africa. . . but they were here on the soil. . . . So I had to develop what I thought their dance would be from who they were, which meant that the dance was unique to them. . . . And the clue was their background, they were free, they were in Ohio, they had previously been slaves. . . it had tinges of all of that because it was in the past and in the future. (personal interview, 3 December 2008)

In addition to dance’s power to express universal themes, Sagolla writes that movement—or the manipulation of bodies in space and time—is an effective medium through which to convey dramatic events that don’t happen in “real time.” For instance, in the musical *Coco*, choreographers Bennett and Bob Avian compressed “ten days of book within a dance number” with the use of intricately orchestrated costume changes and a revolving set to stage Coco’s madcap sprint to redesign a fashion lineup (Bennett qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 99).

Sagolla also pinpoints the power of kinesthetic communication, when an audience actually physically reacts to a performer’s movement as if they were in the performer’s shoes. For example, McIntyre choreographed a waltz for a climactic scene in August Wilson’s *King Hedley II* and collaborated with Wilson while he fine tuned the play through several iterations on its way to Broadway. McIntyre recalls, “It was very exciting for me because August Wilson developed the dance more and more with each production that we did because he saw that it was a turning point in the [play]—that made me really. . . feel great. He would change actually how [the dance] was faded in the script with each production” (personal interview, 3 December 2008).
In the scene, Elmore erupts in jealousy in response to watching his fiancée Ruby sensually waltzing in remembrance of her former lover, who is also King’s (her son) deceased father. The dialog emphasizes that there is no music playing and that it is, instead, all in Ruby’s imagination. Elmore’s jealousy escalates into a heated confrontation that culminates in him revealing to King who his father really is. McIntyre explains, “In that dance, her ecstasy, you can see him seething, the other man starting to seethe, as she's dancing and it's not just she's saying these things about the man but it's the way she is in the dance. The dance has carried her away into another time and another place when she was with this other man” (personal interview, 3 December 2008).

I believe that Wilson probably recognized that the kinesthetic communication of this dance was working powerfully on several levels; hence, he continued to develop and adjust the scene around it. One can imagine the audience experiencing at least three things at once: Ruby’s sensual experiences, Elmore’s feverish jealousy, and a wrenching dread watching King’s naive arrogance as he scowls at his mother. Layered meanings and the binding of past and present is quickly and powerfully communicated without words through a simple, sensual waltz.

To summarize, Chapter 2 examined ways to read scripts. The principal ideas discussed were conflict-resolution structure, character, given circumstances, audience expectations, and devices of a dramatist’s craft.

For this study, script analysis is defined as analysis that is conducted with the specific purpose of putting a play on the stage. In doing this research, evidence has begun to emerge that there is more overlap than barriers between the languages of dramaturgy and movement.
Dramaturgy and movement fully merge, particularly when movement becomes the most effective way to express a dramatic moment. Because script analysis overlaps and, indeed, merges with the development of choreography, especially when discussing how and when to use movement, there should be little doubt that the two activities have the potential to inform one another and provide a deeper understanding of how the dramatic elements in the interconnected whole relate.
CHAPTER 3: HOW DO THE STEPS WORK?

_I think very few people understand the sort of deep fabric that choreography has to be in order to function organically inside of a musical or a play._

- Lynne Taylor-Corbett (personal interview, 5 December 2008).

While a study of the interrelationship between script analysis and choreography would be incomplete without understanding script analysis, it would, likewise, be inadequate without understanding the basic elements of choreography. This chapter’s overview of choreographic elements will be primarily based on texts that were written to teach the craft of choreography. Whereas Chapter 2 looked at elements and writing devices that make plays “work,” in the same way, this chapter will look at the elements and choreographic devices that make choreography “work.”

There are many serviceable textbooks on the topic of teaching choreography. However, this study will primarily borrow the principles found in Blom and Chaplin’s widely recognized _The Intimate Act of Choreography_, which The Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation has recommended for its comprehensiveness and range (Diamond and Berliner 54). Blom and Chaplin isolate basic principles of movement with the recognition that these elements do blend with and define each other in choreography. Blom and Chaplin analyze choreographic elements “separately in theoretical and practical terms. . . to help identify their nature and the extent of their potential” (Blom and Chaplin 4).

Choreographic teaching methods typically break movement down into basic principles, similar to script analysis methods that break a play down into components. This breakdown of movement into basic parts reflects the work and thinking of German
theorist Rudolph Laban. Laban’s analysis emphasized movement principles that were independent of a fixed set of steps or aesthetic (Sagolla 125-126). Similar to Laban, Bessie Schönberg also avoided teaching a particular school of dance or style such as classical ballet or Graham technique. She, instead, investigated movement from the standpoint of these features: “locomotion and axial movement, sharp and percussive movement, continuous and smooth movement, size of movement, focus, fast and slow, and constant contact with another person” (Nazzaro Noble 127).

Yet another useful tool for thinking about movement principles is the commonly used acronym BEST, which represents four elements of choreography: Body, Energy, Space, and Time. There are slight variations, where sometimes the term “force” substitutes for the term “energy.” The effectiveness of the BEST approach is its accessibility; in fact, it is used to teach creative movement to children. For example, educators Anne Green Gilbert and Mary Joyce incorporate these elements into their curriculums. Because of its directness and simplicity, BEST will be used to structure the chapter’s review of basic dance elements.

BODY

The first element in BEST refers to the human body. Blom and Chaplin assert that because human beings so strongly identify with the human body that dance “is one of the least abstract of the arts as is drama” (126). Simon Murray proposes that Western culture’s preoccupation and fascination with the body in things like fashion, makeovers, and physical fitness provides a strong social context for the growth of “physical theater” in late-twentieth-century Europe (38-39). Murray defines “physical theatre” as theater that derives its identity from “the performer’s live body more than the spoken text . . .To
put it another way, it is the body and its movement through and in space that is the crucial
generator of meaning and significance in contemporary theatre. . .one of its important
qualities is that it is work that apparently cares little for the traditional boundaries
between different art forms” (34). Physical theater contrasts with some other forms in
which the performers’ bodies become, instead, transparent and are simply vehicles for the
story or message of the play (Wallis and Shepherd 115). Perhaps identifying the
predominant element of a dramatic text as proposed by W. Ball would help to estimate
just how much a performance should either emphasize or down play the physical
presence of an actor. For example, if a play is dominated by its language, then it might be
advisable to avoid extra movement. If, on the other hand, the predominant element is
spectacle, then featuring many moving bodies would be effective in heightening
excitement.

The human body has many expressive parts. Indeed, one of Blom and Chaplin’s
chapters is aptly titled “The Speaking Body” (16). Even if only one limb is moving, the
stillness in the rest of the body can help to define the overall architecture and movement
structure (Blom and Chaplin 16).

Body movements can be organized into phrases. Blom and Chaplin compare a
choreographic phrase to a sentence (23), and I maintain that by extension it can also be
thought of as a line of dialog in a play. Using this analogy, a choreographic phrase is
something that the human body “speaks.” A choreographic phrase has a beginning,
middle, end (Blom and Chaplin 23), and what Blom and Chaplin call a “high point,” or
climax, of the phrase (24). Similar to an acting “beat,” the phrase helps build the overall
structure of a choreographic work.
ENERGY

Second in the acronym BEST is energy. Blom and Chaplin distinguish energy from force. They define energy as the potential for force, and force as the expenditure of energy. They equate dynamics as the use of force in time. To get some sense of the wide range of possibilities for dynamics, Blom and Chaplin recommend Roget’s Thesaurus’s comprehensive list of synonyms for the word “motion.” Many of these synonyms conjure vivid kinesthetic images such as scramble, push, jerk, fling, heave, shrug, hush, puff, hook, and twitch (“motion”). These words not only graphically describe dynamics and motion; they also start to tell a story. They are very similar to actions that actors search for and select to carry them towards their objective. Stanislavski taught his actors to search for such action verbs because, as noted earlier, they help to merge physical action with the spoken word. There are recommended action verb examples in Joanna Merlin’s acting manual. Her comprehensive list features “conquer . . . grab . . . jolt . . . open . . . pinch . . . twist” (59-60). Words like these are quite evocative and inherently suggest both movement and narrative; each word could become the seed of a dance, story, or both.

SPACE

Bodies, props, and scenery move in space. Hornby writes that even without any scenery or lighting change, the repositioning of actors in the performance area affects how the audience interprets the space (76). Similarly, Lecoq taught, “The form, purpose and organi[z]ation of space have a profound impact on how we move in it. We move differently in a supermarket and in a church, a bedroom and a kitchen . . .” (qtd. in Murray 89).
Blom and Chaplin examine several physical properties of space, and two – direction and shape – will be discussed here to illustrate space’s kinesthetic qualities, and the potential for sociological and psychological connotations. Space’s physical property of direction is essentially defined through a sense of movement, has a feeling of being alive, and evokes dramatic associations. Blom and Chaplin write, “Retreat takes us back, while a chase goes forward . . . Sneaking or shifting movement often goes on a diagonal. People . . . who are assertive, aggressive, all move forward” (34).

Space also has shape. Blom and Chaplin list shapes as static or moving, “curved or straight”, “symmetrical or asymmetrical” (37). Shapes are created with one or more bodies that are either static or moving in relation to space. Straight-edged shapes and angles can create order but when moving they can be choppy, percussive, with a strong sense of direction, and “machinelike” rigidity (Blom and Chaplin37-38). Curved shapes can connote such qualities as flow, eternity, nature, and femininity. Blom and Chaplin associate these with softness, calm, “suppleness . . . [and] an attitude of caring and accommodation” (37).

Shapes can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetry refers to designs that have equality on “both sides of center” and connotes stability, certainness, balance, and power (38-39). Because human beings strive to create order out of chaos, asymmetry connotes imbalance, and is inherently dynamic, unpredictable and, therefore, dramatic. Blom and Chaplin suggest that asymmetry can be used at the climax of a dance. They write, “Because dance is about . . . dynamism, its moments of excitement and high interest are usually asymmetrical, with symmetry being used for points of departure or closure” (39).
TIME

Hornby says that what distinguishes a dramatic text from other forms of literature “is the importance of real space and real time” (102). Using very similar wording, Blom and Chaplin write that choreographers can create movement inspired by movement for its own sake, that is “all aspects of the human body moving in time and space” (13).

While understanding that space and time are interconnected in movement, Blom and Chaplin set time apart for the purposes of highlighting its characteristics. Blom and Chaplin study several time properties, three of which – tempo, momentum, and rhythm – will be discussed here to illustrate their expressive potential.

The first of these properties, tempo, describes the perception of a movement’s speed. If a person is moving in a slow tempo they will generally cover less space than a person moving in a faster tempo over the same period of time. Momentum is related to tempo in that it refers to acceleration or deceleration of tempo. The peak or climax occurs when the tempo is the fastest in an accelerating choreographic phrase. Likewise, the climax could be at the slowest tempo in a decelerating phrase. Because momentum can express climax, it is a movement property that is often used to build conflict-resolution structure. For example, door-slamming farces, such as *Lend Me a Tenor*, exploit the time property of momentum. Often they are staged with choreographed entrances and exits, hurled dialog, and slamming doors that increase in speed as the mayhem builds towards climax and resolution.

Rhythm is another property of time that has dramatic potential. Rhythms are characterized by accented notes in a musical phrase or accented movements in a choreographic phrase. Blom and Chaplin look at movement rhythm in terms of being
regular or irregular. In discussing the coupling, or rhyming, of narration and action (when narration delivered by onstage characters is followed by action in a predictable pattern) Wallis and Shepherd call attention to how an audience can find pleasure and security in their fulfilled expectations. The narration and subsequent unfolding action in *Our Town* is an example of the nostalgia and pleasure that an audience can feel through experiencing this kind of regular rhythm. Regular rhythm can be similarly expressive in movement. For example, joy can be expressed through bright, bouncing movement dictated by the predictable beat of a marching band. Blom and Chaplin point out that irritability can also be expressed when the duration of a regular beat is too long and becomes “deadening” (63).

As opposed to regular rhythmical beats, irregular rhythmical beats can be quite confusing for an audience to follow, but, on the other hand, can be used to intrigue and engage them. Because irregular rhythms are unexpected, they have the capacity to help shock, disorient, annoy, and amuse (Blom and Chaplin 63).

The four principles of movement as represented by the acronym BEST are: Body, Energy, Space, and Time. How these elements are combined and shaped into choreography can be determined by the compositional structures that a choreographer employs. Blom and Chaplin call these structures forms. Citing American dance critic John Martin, they write that form can be the messenger, as when it becomes a metaphor expressing human emotion. When a form is used for purely abstract, architectural purposes, it can be “the message itself” (Martin qtd. in Blom and Chaplin 84). Blom and Chaplin write that a form can function as a device with which to generate raw material. They also say that a form can give raw choreographic material structure (85).
This paper will discuss three examples of compositional forms that are found in Blom and Chaplin’s comprehensive study: organic form, theme and variations, and narrative form. The first, organic form, grows out of the nature of a dance composition itself. Blom and Chaplin write that transitions, or how one movement evolves into the next, have a kinesthetic rationale that is particular to that organic form (87).

Whereas organic form emphasizes design that emerges from the internal “kinesthetic logic” of the dance itself (Blom and Chaplin 87), compositional structures, according to Blom and Chaplin, can also be imposed onto the raw choreographic material from the outside. Some choreographic compositional structures imitate patterns found in the natural world whereas other structures are borrowed from other art forms such as music and drama (Blom and Chaplin 92). For example, theme and variations can be thought of as a musical structure.

Blom and Chaplin define theme and variations as a dance compositional structure in which “the internal sequence remains constant” but is interpreted differently through one or more iterations (99). Once a theme is established, emphasis is shifted from the theme's substance to the differences between the variations on the theme. How theme and variations can work choreographically can be illustrated with the second act number “Twelve Days to Christmas” from She Loves Me. “Twelve Days to Christmas” has four sung verses, each of which is interspersed with book scenes. The number is set in a perfumery; each of the four verses is sung twelve, nine, four, and one day to Christmas, respectively. If each customer repeats the same entrance, shopping business, and exit with each verse, then the humor is found in the difference in how the customers perform these tasks as their shopping day occurs closer to Christmas. For instance, when there are
still twelve days to Christmas, the customers go about their shopping in a leisurely calm manner whereas when there is only one day left, they are absolutely frantic.

In addition to organic form, and theme and variations, Blom and Chaplin also discuss narrative form, which they equate with storytelling. They, more or less, define narrative form by listing examples of well-known story genres and plots, such as biblical tales. What their discussion overlooks is relating narrative form to the significant potential to be found in exploiting conflict-resolution structure. Understandably, their book focuses on dance and not dramaturgy. Nonetheless in their review of narrative, they do not relate the BEST elements of dance to the dramatic principles of building tension and conflict with obstacles and opposing forces.

Examples of how tension, conflict, and obstacles can be used to structure movement can be found in Joe Layton’s choreographic process. Layton created obstacles for himself that would force him to find creative solutions to get around them. He inserted a conflict-resolution structure of sorts into the blocking and structure of his shows. For example, he would try to create a duet with a trio of dancers, which is a structure that inherently has conflict and tension. Layton said:

I design trouble for myself . . . little problems to solve . . . when it came to a show like George M, for instance . . . in the course of the number they changed costumes. Each time they made an entrance there was another piece of garment on. By the time the number was done, they were into the next scene . . . That is a device that then forces me to make exits, forces me to make certain patterns, so I’m forced. That’s the problem I give myself. (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 52)
Another example of using conflict-resolution structure with movement can be found in the teaching of choreographer and educator Daniel Nagrin. Nagrin used a simple, task-oriented exercise as part of which he instructed a student to crawl under a folding chair without moving it. The objective was to move under and through the chair; the obstacle is the chair itself. Nagrin observed that for many dance students who are hard-wired to pursue grace and beauty, this exercise provides an epiphany of sorts because it is the first time that they really just do something that is “not muddied with a focus on appearance or style” (19).

The creative impetus that Layton’s self-imposed obstacles gave him and the self-instruction that the crawling-under-the-chair exercise provided illustrate the effectiveness of movement structures that are built with obstacles, tension, and conflict. These often simple structures can create connections to ideas, debates, and metaphors that, like in the case of Nagrin’s chair exercise, extend beyond the beauty of the movement itself. Underlying the importance of these connections, Bennett said of his work with co-choreographer Bob Avian, “We do not try to do a number until we have an idea, a hook for a number, some sort of concept, stylistically or in terms of the particular plot, or where the number is happening, or the style of movement that leads us to some form of structure” (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 96).

Organic form, theme and variations, and narrative form are compositional structures. Blom and Chaplin write that “motif and development,” on the other hand, is not a compositional structure but, instead, is a choreographic device; in other words, motif and development is used to generate raw choreographic material rather than provide a structure for it (101-102). With motif and development, unlike theme and
variations, there are no rules for keeping the original theme or sequence intact (101). Blom and Chaplin suggest sixteen ways to play with a motif including repeating, inverting, fragmenting, performing it backwards or with different body parts (102-103). The development of a movement motif can be compared to David Ball’s concept of an image. Like a language image, a motif can spider out into multiple possibilities. For example, in José Limón’s The Moor’s Pavane, a repeating pavane dance motif is used to establish characters that are inextricably tied to traditional roles and courtly rituals. With each repetition of the dance, the symmetry of the quartet crumbles. Each time the pavane resumes, its formality continues to disintegrate, and one watches with growing apprehension as the destruction of the Moor unfolds.

In summary, Chapter 3 covered BEST, which represents the four main components of choreography: Body, Energy, Space, and Time. In addition, it reviewed three examples of compositional form: organic form, theme and variations, and narrative form. It discussed one choreographic device: motif and development. Through breaking down choreography into its main components and touching upon compositional structures and devices, this chapter attempts to dispel some of the mystery of movement language so that its “words” and “sentences” are more accessible and comprehensible. Familiarity with these concepts should facilitate critical discussion and evaluation of choreography, methods for which will be laid out in Chapter 4.

This chapter’s examination of basic choreographic elements and, very importantly, their expressive potential provides evidence of the rich vocabulary and extensive, expressive range of movement and its ability to convey meaning. This evidence can help to dispel the view held by some theater practitioners that the craft of
choreography is at odds or mismatched with the craft of staging plays. Instead of being a production element that is an “add-on” or something that is somehow separate, the vocabulary of movement can be thought of as whole new group of “words” with which to express the intent of the dramatic text. However, in order to be able to incorporate these movement “words” into the critical discussion that inevitably plays into any revision process, like any other language, one has to practice using them.

I believe that being able to articulate movement concepts, such as those presented in Chapter 3, clarifies one’s artistic vision, as well as responses to choreographic work, whether it is one’s own or somebody else’s. It stands to reason that the more one can refine the articulation of one’s ideas, the deeper one’s understanding and that of one’s collaborators’ of those visions will be.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYZING CHOREOGRAPHY

[If I can articulate something well to Bobby [Avian], and vice versa, we can come in the next day and convince a group of writers or dancers that this is the way we’re going.]

– Michael Bennett (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 108)

If choreography is used to stage plays, and is, therefore, a functioning element of the dramatic whole, then it stands to reason that choreography should get the same critical attention and careful review given to script analysis. Chapter 2 examined methods with which to read scripts. Similarly, this chapter will look at methods with which to “read” choreography.

Before reviewing methods for analyzing choreography, the objection that intellectual theory does not facilitate the physical craft of choreography should be acknowledged. There are many choreographers and dancers who would strongly object to applying any intellectual thinking or analytical theories to their creative process. For instance, Tharp writes, “I didn’t start out knowing this; it came to me over time, as I realized that I would never get to the essential core of movement and dance through a cerebral process. I could prepare, order, organize, structure, and edit my creativity in my head, but I couldn’t think my way into a dance. To generate ideas, I had to move” (99). It has to be stressed that analytical theory is not being advocated here as tool to generate raw choreographic material. Instead, what is being proposed is that analysis and evaluation not only help with the revision process, but as Schönberg taught, also with the development of one’s staging and choreographic craft through disciplined, careful observation of choreographic work. Schönberg considered how learning to observe choreography and articulate one’s observations is just as important for her students as
learning how to dance (Nazzaro Noble 133). She said, “[We have to train] ourselves to be observant; to be rigidly honest with what we see; and to be able to hopefully learn to be articulate about what we see and to put it to test by speaking about what we can see” (qtd. in Nazzaro Noble 130).

Like Schönberg, educator Larry Lavender also makes a case for learning how to critically analyze choreography. In rebutting what he believes to be a widely-held assumption by dance educators that the only way to assess choreography is by doing it, he cautions that, when a choreographer evaluates his or her own work with no input from others, their reliance on subjective responses and preset criteria can become ingrained (55). In making his argument, Lavender references critical theorist George Boas who wrote that there is an inclination to think that one’s own perceptions are standard for not only oneself but for everyone else, and that it requires concerted effort and education to accept that our own biases do not necessarily represent those of the whole (56).

How can a choreographer, or a director for that matter, train themselves to be objective, perceptive, and articulate in their observations and evaluations of choreographic work? How might these observations be appropriately shared with one’s collaborators? In order to answer these questions, three methods of critical analysis for choreography will be reviewed: Schönberg’s, Lavender’s, and a third by co-authors Liz Lerman and John Borstel.

A pioneer in American dance education and choreographer mentoring, Schönberg incorporated prescribed observation and discussion sessions into her choreography classes. Schönberg “believed that critical response was most effective when focused around the relationship of the elements of the piece . . . without revealing one’s opinion,
tastes, interpretation or aesthetic biases” (Nazzaro Noble 143). Schönberg’s teaching methods for advanced students, and professional choreographers “were limited to: viewing, choreography, constructive criticism, and group discussion” (Nazzaro Noble 142). Nazzaro Noble observed Schönberg’s advanced- and professional-level choreography workshops in New York in the 1980s and 1990s. Choreographers were permitted to introduce themselves and ask questions before presenting their work to the group, but were to remain silent during the feedback. Schönberg guided the group to avoid personal preferences in their response and to not repeat what was already articulated by someone else. Schönberg called upon her students to, “Come to the point, do it impersonally”; get to the “evaluation of the goodies that are in something, or the mistakes that are being made, or the weaknesses . . . Be economical” (qtd. in Nazzaro Noble 143-144). Schönberg also encouraged suggestions for revision.

Like Schönberg, Lavender promotes analysis as an integral part of the process of making art. He states that “choreography like other art-making activities, is a revision process consisting of putting something together, assessing it, taking it apart, and putting it together again” (21). He believes that critical thinking abilities should be cultivated as necessary supports of choreographic skills, and that it takes time for new understanding of movement to reflect itself in the actual work. He writes, “This is one of the reasons why art-making in general is difficult —one always knows a bit more about what to do than one is capable of doing” (133).

Lavender distinguishes critical discussion from casual conversation. He defines casual conversation as superficial first impressions with a rapid change of subject and focus, and that the goal of this type of exchange is camaraderie and being liked (14).
Critical discussion, on the other hand, is a directed, disciplined “reflective inquiry” and “mode of persuasion”, which focuses on the work (14).

Lavender argues some of the benefits to honing critical evaluation skills. First is the avoidance of “premature closure — declaring a piece finished for lack of further ideas of how to develop or refine it” (16). The second deals with challenges in the creative process. According to Lavender, two struggles take place: one between the critical ego and creative ego (when the former devalues the latter’s efforts), and the second between the choreographer and his materials or “the totality of the possibilities of movement” (16-17). Lavender asserts that critical dialog skills help prepare choreographers to face these challenges and that engagement in constructive critical dialog furthers the understanding that making art requires perseverance.

Business analyst Vandenbosch’s advice bares some similarity to Lavender’s. She writes, “By making your logic transparent, you open your potential conclusions and solutions to legitimate debate based on facts and capabilities rather than intuition and politics” (3). Vandenbosch’s comments support the notion that learning critical discourse can build the intellectual skills that can help steer the creative process through the conflicts associated with collaboration. In addition to the struggles that Lavender mentions, theater practitioners can put people near the top of their list. For instance, Twyla Tharp places “other people” as one of her top challenges (123). Likewise Simon McBurney, founding artistic director of Theater de la Complicite, recalled that collaborating with other students at Lecoq’s school in Paris seemed to be always with people whom he hated (Murray 61).
In addition to helping choreographers steer through some of the struggles of making art, Lavender argues that analyzing choreography can actually be fun. In doing so, he also dispels the notion that dancers and choreographers are nonintellectual beings, and that their high level of athletic ability and refined physical skills rule out analytical capacity and intellectual curiosity. To the contrary, he believes that choreographers can acquire analytical skills, learn to enjoy critical analysis, and discover that it can stimulate artistic development (55). Several other educators and scholars also promote the enjoyment to be found in detail-oriented analytical work. For instance Hornby says, “The close details of a script should not be a cause for impatience . . . but rather a source of inspiration and delight” (125). And Blom and Chaplin also advise that, even though using choreographic forms and devices can be “mechanical or cerebral,” they offer a way to keep going “even in periods of noninspiration” (85).

Lavender specifies some dos and don’ts of his analytic process. Like Schönberg, Lavender delineates subjective responses, which are more likely to describe the viewer, from critical responses, which describe the observable interrelated elements of the work of art (30). In addition, he rejects using predetermined criteria or arbitrary artistic standards because he believes that they prevent the development of personal artistic values (37). He also holds that external, observable features of the choreography take precedence over author intention and an author’s interpretation of his or her own dance (47).

Lavender goes on to debunk a few common assumptions that can inhibit and impede the development of critical evaluative skills. For example, he questions the belief that it is “the teacher’s job to tell students what is good” (50). He asserts that depending
on the authority of one person precludes learning from observation and, instead, relies on
criteria that have not been vetted through rigorous discussion and examination (51). The
classroom is the context for Lavender’s theories; however, his ideas can be applied to the
director/choreographer relationship during preproduction and rehearsals. A
choreographer can often accept the director’s views as the absolute authority on both the
dramatic text and even the choreography. Broadway veteran choreographer Larry Fuller
says, “It’s what the steps are about and why people are dancing that is important for
choreographers to glean from their directors” (“Shall We Dance” 36). Although it is very
beneficial to have a clear understanding of a director’s vision, what happens if this vision
is misguided or worse, if they don’t have a vision? When a choreographer is not the
director, they have been hired usually because the director does not have the movement
vocabulary needed to stage at least part of the dramatic text. If the choreographer does
not have the critical analytical skills that deepen their understanding of both the script and
their own work, then they will have to accept the unexamined views of the director. They
will also forfeit the benefit of building their own rich understanding of the text and how
their work relates to it.

Similarly if a director, composer, or playwright does not have critical analytical
skills with which to observe choreography, then he or she might be mesmerized but
bound, nonetheless, to the choices of a highly skilled movement specialist, whose
dynamic and exciting work does not quite relate to the rest of the production.
Furthermore, when both parties do have critical analytical skills, the work can build from
more than one strong voice. Broadway director David Warren says, “There’s a kind of
physical storytelling that the choreographer intuitively understands, which is more
interesting. I think it’s great when we talk to each other about our work, and it isn’t just the director’s vision being delivered back to him or her . . . It’s two interpretive artists lucky enough to be in the same room at the same time, compelling each other to do better work” (“Shall We Dance” 37).

Jerry Mitchell’s ability to evaluate Terrance McNally’s book for *The Full Monty* illustrates Warren’s point. For the opening number, “Scrap,” Mitchell followed the stage directions in McNally’s book, which isolated each of the five working-class men in separate apartments, each doing individualized stage business. Mitchell choreographed five different versions before realizing that the concept was not introducing the story clearly, and what should have been conveyed was that they were all in the same scrap heap together. Mitchell recalls:

So we decided to put them all in a union meeting where they were going to get their check for being laid off. And we set up a bunch of chairs . . . in the basement of a church or wherever your union maybe would be and we sat the guys down in the chair and the minute we sat them down in the chair, I thought oh, this is great, because they're scrap and their stuck. And there was nothing for them to do except to turn around in their chair and sing what they were feeling. And the only choreography really or the movement, was that the meeting is over, let's clean up and they go into the last verse and there was a metal stand in the room that held folding chairs. . . And we sort of choreographed real guys in real time picking up chairs, closing them with frustration and slamming them onto this metal rack and suddenly, that was it . . . That was the perfect physical movement to match
the frustration that these guys were feeling...It came about very organically but really, by trusting the text, trusting the story, and listening to it over and over and letting it lead you as opposed to you trying to force something onto it. (telephone interview)

Another widely-held belief that Lavender tackles is that criticism hurts egos. He believes this is based on two misconceptions that one has to feel “psychologically safe and secure” and that “criticism in the form of peer evaluation threatens this kind of security” (52). He argues that criticism that is poorly delivered as harsh criticism is not constructive in the educational environment, but that the risk of executing critical evaluation poorly is not a sound argument for avoiding it altogether (53).

The acronym “ORDER” represents the five basic steps of Lavender’s methodology for critical discussion and evaluation: Observation, Reflective Writing, Discussion, Evaluation, and Revision (2).

Observation is the first step in Lavender’s method. It instructs the observer to focus on the artwork itself, consciously filtering out personal preconceptions and expectations, and actively noticing the present reality rather than recognizing elements that support one’s own values. This can be applied to both reading a dramatic text and observing choreography. For a seasoned theater practitioner, I believe that being perceptually open can be even more challenging. The adage “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it!” is both comforting and seductive in that it is tempting to stick with one’s own views, especially when they have proven successful when applied in the past.

In the second step, Reflective Writing, Lavender stresses the importance of writing before speaking. In an educational setting students have the chance to hone their
own abilities to remember and articulate their observations before being influenced by the
views others. The student observes, refines his or her understanding of the nuance in the
work observed, and articulates how the relationships work within the piece.

At this point, it might be beneficial to address the objection that reflective writing
is not feasible in a professional environment: that it is impractical to take a short five-
minute break during the middle of a busy rehearsal to write down a few thoughts on a
sheet of paper. I would argue, however, that it is precisely when I, for one, am in the
director/choreographer role – orchestrating and motivating others – that I stop listening,
observing, and calmly taking in what is actually happening in the rehearsal. I believe that
taking a few minutes to reflect and articulate observations might encourage patience; it
might be a good antidote to my adrenaline rush and the passions that flare up in the heat
of the moment. Furthermore, reflective writing can embody characteristics of a close
reading of a script in that it can develop and articulate an understanding of not only the
choreography but its relationship to the dramatic text.

The third step of Lavender’s method is Discussion. Here Lavender advocates first
sharing reflective notes before presenting interpretations. With sharing reflective notes,
students can compare what they experienced privately with what others experienced and,
through this comparison, perhaps gauge the relevance of their own observations. Private
observations can also be clarified and augmented by the observations of others (81).

After sharing reflective notes, the Discussion moves into its second stage, which
is interpretation. Interpretation should be supported by observable features in the
choreography, and a student should be able to persuade others based on these observable
features, especially when more than one interpretation has surfaced (81-82). Conversation
can bring to light one or more valid interpretations, and this ambiguity can indicate richness and complexity (84). Lavender counsels that ranking or evaluating aspects of the work should be avoided, but, instead, the discussion should seek to “assess how artistic principles are operating within the work” (86). Lavender instructs that a choreographer should maintain an open mind about interpretations, and, when questioned about aspects of his or her work, he or she should try to offer an “artistic justification” versus a “general explanation.” An artistic justification relates interpretation to observable features and advances the artistic conversation; a general comment is non-informative and can be a dead end (85-86).

In the Evaluation step of Lavender’s ORDER approach, a judgment is made that is based on observations and supported interpretations. Judgments, be they aesthetic or comparative, cannot be avoided in a professional environment, where decisions often call for the allocation of scarce resources. For example, judgments are made when deciding whether to keep a dance number in a show, or whether to rehire a choreographer. Lavender states that judgments are not feelings, nor are they facts. It is my belief that hard decisions can be made with more confidence if these decisions are based on evidence found through thoughtful and structured analytical and evaluative processes.

Revision is the last step of Lavender’s ORDER method. Lavender believes that student suggestions for thoughtful specific revisions, which are based on observable features of the choreography, are of true benefit to the choreographer (105). There is a caveat here, however, and Lavender cites art educator David Perkins when he warns that, unless a choreographer understands the reasoning behind the suggested revisions, the suggestions will likely be ignored, and “may even provoke defensiveness on the part of
the artist towards all evaluative remarks” (105). Arts educators Lerman and Borstel give a similar warning when they write, “[w]hen defensiveness starts, learning stops” (21).

Like Schönberg and Lavender, co-authors Lerman and Borstel’s method for analyzing choreography has prescribed steps. Compared to Lavender and Schönberg’s, Lerman and Borstel’s four-step approach is less about describing the artwork itself, and more about deepening the creative thought process of both the artist and the observer, and breaking down impediments to this development. For instance, while Lavender and Schönberg limit the verbal participation of the presenting artist, Lerman and Borstel propose engaging the artist throughout most of the process. In addition, Lerman and Borstel suggest the involvement of a facilitator so that participants receive full value from the experience; they also propose that instructions and expectations be carefully laid out before any presentations begin.

Co-author Lerman is a working choreographer as much as she is an educator. She developed a methodology for critical response, the motivation for which came from an accumulated deep dissatisfaction with prevailing practices. She writes, “I had not found peace with the army of feelings brought up by both giving and receiving criticism . . . So called ‘feedback sessions’ often seemed brutal and frequently not very helpful . . . I had trouble getting what I needed from these conversations, and had trouble knowing what other artists wanted from them” (Lerman and Borstel 6).

Taylor-Corbett echoes Lerman’s sentiment when describing feedback for her work in Merrily We Roll Along at La Jolla Playhouse, which she received shortly before opening night. She says, “The director [James Lapine] told me something like: ‘keep the shape of the number, just take out all the steps‘. I adore James . . . I just felt utterly at sea
with the comment. I did get something out there. . . . I just don't remember what”
(personal email communication, 30 September 2008).

Lerman’s co-author and an educator, John Borstel, uses a vivid metaphor to
describe poorly delivered criticism. He writes, “Opinions can feel very much like objects
thrown at us. If we have no preparation we can often feel affronted rather than engaged.
But with a little notice and a moment to adjust to what’s coming at us, we can be in a
much better position to ‘catch’ the opinion” (22).

The first step in Lerman and Borstel’s method involves gathering “statements of
meaning” (30), and, although not quite as disciplined as either Lavender or Schönberg’s,
it does reflect their emphasis on carefully articulating what is observed and avoiding
expression of personal preferences and judgments (30).

Their second step is one in which the artist asks questions; it is a pointed approach
to engage the critical response of the artist. In this step, the artist poses questions that
require more than a yes or no answer to the responders (34). As a simple collaboration
tool, this technique has the potential to be much more effective in engaging an artist on
their terms rather than trying to impose a thought process on them from the outside.

For Lerman and Borstel’s third step, the roles reverse, and the responders ask the
artist questions. It is important that these questions be neutral. Especially if a responder
has formed an opinion, the responder is encouraged to reword his or her concerns so that
no evaluative statements are implied in the question (23). The artist is encouraged to
answer responders’ questions by explaining what the artist plans to do moving forward as
opposed to rehashing what the artist had intended (34). Neutral questions can avoid
statements of opinions altogether because the artist is often acutely aware of the issue that
motivated the question. Here, again, the artist has a chance to frame challenges and solutions through their own analysis rather than simply following a directive.

Lerman and Borstel’s fourth step is “permissioned opinions” (35), which means that a responder asks the artist’s permission to offer an opinion about something specific in the work, usually something that relates to a neutral question already posed to the artist in step three. Again, the opinion should not be couched in the question. The artist can say no.

Unlike Schönberg and Lavender, Lerman and Borstel do not encourage suggestions for revision, and a step when these are offered to the artist is not included in their methodology. However, if a responder has a revision suggestion, Lerman and Borstel advise that the responder should ask the artist permission to offer a revision suggestion. The request to offer a revision suggestion must be specifically connected to some aspect of the work just shown.

The goal of Lerman and Borstel’s analytical process is to move the work forward, which, they believe, cannot be accomplished when an artist adopts a defensive response to the critique. Even though this methodology seems well-suited to presenting a work-in-progress to an audience, Lerman and Borstel recommend these techniques for collaborative dialog, such as what might be shared between a director and a choreographer. For these types of informal settings, they say that the basic steps can be done in any order with or without a moderator (48). Lerman says that she even poses neutral questions to herself to reframe a problem when she feels unproductive and negative (52).
In my view, there would seem to be a parallel between articulating neutral questions in response to choreography, and articulating major dramatic questions that arise from a dramatic text. Both these activities have the potential to deepen understanding and to increase a spirit of openness and receptivity. This understanding and openness can create more room within which to develop ideas and material; it extends horizons of discovery.

In summary, Chapter 4 examined three methods for analyzing choreography by Schönberg, Lavender, and co-authors Lerman and Borstel. Lavender as well as Lerman and Borstel present persuasive arguments for incorporating thoughtful, disciplined, analytical methods into the creative process of choreographing. The thoroughness of these approaches demonstrates that some dance educators and professionals have given serious thought to the need for choreographers to develop and enhance their analytical skills.

Reasonable objections can be raised that the analytical methods presented in this chapter are only applicable in educational settings or for audience-oriented, work-in-progress performances. It can also be argued that these methods are not appropriate for high-pressure, professional collaborative environments. However Lerman and Borstel hold that the same professional standards that apply to dance technique and rehearsal protocols should also apply to the important moments when new work is scrutinized (54). Also, in respect to professional standards, Lavender’s ideas are embraced by the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation as evidenced in *The Stage Directors Handbook*, which suggests that Lavender’s approach might “also benefit directors and choreographers in the rehearsal process” (Diamond and Berliner 53).
CHAPTER 5: HOW ARE CHOREOGRAPHERS READING SCRIPTS, AND HOW IS THEIR CHOREOGRAPHY CRITICALLY EVALUATED?

Contemporary choreographers, they rarely are saying, “Oh, come in here and see my piece and tell me what you think about it.” It just—I don't know, it's just how we go.

— Dianne McIntyre (personal interview, 3 December 2008).

This chapter will study how choreographers interact with and collaborate on the staging of scripts, and to what degree critical evaluative methods are applied to their choreography. It focuses upon what choreographers do in reality versus considering what they might do as suggested by theory.

From reading published accounts on choreographers and their work combined with listening to choreographers who were interviewed specifically for this research, three characteristics emerged that seem to influence these activities: an unflagging work ethic, a heavy reliance on visual imagery for inspiration, and a passion for movement. In addition, there was little evidence that the choreographers interviewed for this paper used any formal script-reading techniques or applied formal critical evaluative methods to their choreography. The tendency of choreographers to work hard, work visually, and work kinesthetically combined with the relative absence of formal critical response procedures raised several issues, which this chapter will address. Despite the lack of evidence of formal critical analytical work, there remains affirmation of informal, unstructured vetting and experimentation during preproduction and preview performance periods. There are also many anecdotes that testify to the power of close, ongoing relationships between choreographers and their collaborators.

Before expanding on the above findings, it is worth repeating that the evidence in this chapter is not presented as conclusive. For instance, the pool of interviewees is small
and contains three choreographers in their sixties, and one in his fifties. Two have some college education; however, all of the interviewees learned their craft largely through working professionally. It might be interesting to further the study by interviewing younger choreographers, or those who went through graduate or undergraduate conservatory programs. Also, all participants are director/choreographers and, as such, have been in the role of both director and choreographer. Directors who do not choreograph were not interviewed because this study concentrates primarily on the interpretive role of the choreographer. It would be of value, however, to include their views in a more comprehensive study.

Having acknowledged these limitations, the discussion will begin with what most choreographers share: the dance work ethic. Practice, tenacity, and perfectionism define the remarkable work ethic that drives the dance culture. Choreographers do not shy away from hard labor, and, in fact, many thrive on it. For instance, Robbins, Fosse, and Champion had “huge capacities for work” (Long 220), which helped drive them to the top of their field.

For another example of this, we might look at Twyla Tharp’s exceptional diligence, which carries through into her research and reading. For instance, she fills sturdy cardboard file boxes with research paraphernalia because, as she explains, “I never have to worry about forgetting. One of the biggest fears for a creative person is that some brilliant idea will get lost because you didn’t write it down or put it in a safe place” (81). She stores her boxes on industrial construction scaffolding. She points out, “[T]he shelves are built for hard work. That’s a personal aesthetic choice. I want everything around me, from my dancers to my dances to my shelves to be strong and built to last” (81). She
filled twelve boxes, which were crammed with everything from notebooks and videos to a green beret and a macramé vest, while researching what would eventually become the Broadway musical *Moving Out* (Tharp and Reiter 86-88).

Tharp’s self-described reading habits sound more like a reading “workout” than a cozy afternoon in an armchair with a good book. She admits that she does not read for pleasure but reads competitively. Tharp uses the adverb “archeologically” to describe her method of reading a contemporary book, then subsequently reading what sounds like every book related to it backwards through a linear timeline (110-111). She also “reads fat,” which she defines as reading a book and all of its associated texts such as the author’s biography, and everything else the author wrote including his or her letters (Tharp and Reiter 112).

Mitchell’s diligence shows up in his compulsion to rework and refine his staging. He says:

Even with a show like *Hairspray*, which is probably the biggest hit I've worked on and it's been running for six and half years, *Hairspray*, out of town when we opened, they were jumping through the roof but Jack [O’Brien] and I went to work the next day on fixing and honing and tightening and changing and making it better. I mean, we didn't stop working just because everybody was standing on their feet cheering because ultimately there's always something you can do just a little bit better. (telephone interview)
Legally Blonde song writer Nell Benjamin says, “Jerry is no anti-intellectual, but he doesn’t pre-criticize. Every idea is the most exciting idea he’s ever had. He puts it up there and gives it a try. If it doesn’t work, he’s got another” (Green).

McIntyre and Taylor-Corbett use vocabulary that sounds like the drilling of dance steps when they describe how they familiarize themselves with scripts, as if the repetition will yield results in and of itself. It sounds like they work earnestly at reading scripts, but not necessarily in a systematic way. McIntyre explains that she reads a script “over and over” (personal interview, 3 December 2008). When Taylor-Corbett discusses her own reading methods, she says she memorizes her script. To be accurate, Taylor-Corbett clarifies what she means by memorizing, “Perhaps [instead of memorize] I should say internalize [the script] so that I know why a scene follows another scene. Why do the people react the way they do?” (personal email communication, 27 September 2008).

The impression can be that these choreographers spend a great deal of time and energy to capture as many creative solutions as possible. They have comparatively unlimited amounts of physical energy and discipline, and are used to working with dancers who have the same. The nets that they cast are vast. The question that comes to mind might be: is a huge net always the best way to catch a fish or do you just need to have a good idea of where the fish are? How much creativity is lost when the net is smaller but you have a better plan?

As mentioned in the chapter’s introduction, aside from reading the script over and over, there was little evidence from talking with the interviewed choreographers that they employ solid script-reading techniques. Despite the apparent absence of formal script-reading skills, these choreographers, at the same time, expect high skill levels and superb
craftsmanship from their performers and fellow designers. For example, Clarke says, “I try and only work with really good people because . . . I need people who are free enough and sophisticated enough to trust that nobody knows what the fuck anybody is going to get out of the rehearsal, and just to go in and be challenged by the day and try and find the fun in the moment” (personal interview, 5 December 2008). And Broadway choreographer Graciela Daniele says, “Don't come without craft because you are not ready. Craft is something I expect” (qtd. in Lodge 242). Likewise, Tharp devotes a twenty-page chapter to the importance of skills in her book *The Creative Habit*.

These are all choreographers who have realized high levels of success and professional achievement. The level of their success points to their considerable skills, talents, tenacity, and discipline. With all due respect to their remarkable and hard-won artistic triumphs, the question arises: what would happen if their work were supported by script-reading techniques? Perhaps Tharp would have needed only six boxes of research paraphernalia, instead of twelve, and she would have only needed to read the script and several other connected texts instead of everything connected to the script back through the beginnings of history. Perhaps Taylor-Corbett does not need to memorize the script, and Mitchell does not need to continue quite so long until he gets it right.

The objection can be raised that Tharp might have missed an inspiring piece of research if she had limited her collection of paraphernalia to six boxes. Vandenbosch answers a similar objection when she discusses hypothesized solutions. She writes, “By their very nature, [hypotheses] limit data collection. It is possible that you will miss a key piece of data entirely because you are looking in the wrong place. But without
hypotheses, you are just as likely to miss something; there is more to choose from than you will ever have time to collect and absorb” (68).

Vandenbosch states that, “In general, . . . people who work smart have more power than people who work hard” (21-22). Pat Birch’s following comments suggest agreement with Vandenbosch. Birch is discussing a situation when a musical number is neither fulfilling its intended dramatic function in a show nor is it drawing audience applause. In these situations, she goes back to the script to find where the script is opening itself up to movement. She says:

It’s usually talking to you five pages before. I’m finally getting to the point where I don’t blame me when the number doesn’t work all the time. I have found that you can stage a number many different ways and if it’s still not playing, after the fifth time, I begin to look someplace else. Now I begin to look after the third or fourth time. (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 121)

Birch’s comments suggest that, over time, she has begun to rely more on her of knowledge of the script than on her ability to invent yet one more dance number. Rather than repetitively reinventing and restaging a dance number, shouldn’t choreographers reallocate some of that time and energy into refining a number that they can reasonably predict will eventually function within the confines of the rest of the show? This might be an especially important question when a choreographer is not quite as prolific as, say, Jerry Mitchell. If a choreographer is not particularly inspired then it might be beneficial that the few ideas that they do have work within the parameters of the dramatic text. And
knowing how to read a script might be especially important when they don’t have Jerome Robbins, Jack O’Brien, or August Wilson in the room guiding the way.

Many choreographers rely on their ability to work hard, which can impact how they read scripts in that their capacity to read “hard” might sometimes substitute for reading “smart.” The second characteristic that choreographers share and that impacts how they read scripts is their heavy reliance on visual imagery. Responses from interviewees and a considerable amount of evidence from published accounts on choreographers and their work support the notion that choreographers rely on visual imagery in their creative processes, even when interacting with literature. Choreographer/director Graciela Daniele says, “I think we choreographers are painters – we paint invisibly” (qtd. in Lodge 140). Mitchell says, “I'm very visually based, I always work from an image. . . . My house is absolutely meticulous, but I collect—I see something in a magazine and I rip it out and I put it in a folder in a file” (telephone interview). And Clarke says, “So that as I get an idea, I begin to watch films, I read, I look at art, I look at photographs . . . it's mostly visual” (personal interview, 5 December 2008).

Clarke’s visual acuity, like that of many other choreographers, is highly developed from a lifetime of learning movement through observation of others or oneself. For example when describing Robbins’s dancer, Allyn Mclerie said, “One of the reasons we dancers loved him . . . was that he was a delight to watch. . . . A dancer copies the choreographer and tries to be him. You really try to do the movement exactly as he is doing it. And that was fun because he was wonderful” (qtd. in Jowitt 146). Twyla Tharp also writes:
When I started out as a dancer in New York, I became obsessed with studying every great dancer who was working at the time and patterning myself after him or her. I would literally stand behind them in class, in the copying mode, and fall right into their footsteps... That’s one of the ways I learned to dance... like a writer who writes more vividly because he has a huge vocabulary... I needed to hone my dance skills in order to create (66).

Taylor-Corbett also recalls watching Balanchine’s and Robbins’s choreography as a student, “When I came to New York my first job was at the State Theatre as usherette. Night after night I would watch the dancers as an aspiring ballerina, but what I was really learning about was choreography. I started on the fourth ring where you can see the stage patterns” (“Choreography for the Theatre” 34).

The highly developed visual sensibilities of choreographers enable them to work with the metaphorical expression that David Ball says exists in a script’s images. Ball defines an image as “something we already know or can easily be told that is used to describe, illuminate, or expand upon something we don’t know or cannot easily be told” (69). As opposed to the specificity of, say, a scientific definition, an image can evoke multiple interconnecting meanings. As used by choreographers like Gower Champion, visual images can also come to symbolize multiple meanings of an entire production.

An example of how D. Ball believes that an image functions is evident in the choreographic images that McIntyre’s envisioned for the film Beloved. McIntyre’s work in Beloved was previously discussed in Chapter 2 to exemplify the universality of dance as applied to interpreting scripts. Here her choreography in Beloved is revisited to
illustrate how choreographers think in visual terms. In the film, McIntyre gave idiosyncratic dance vocabulary to the freed slaves, vocabulary that did not characterize any specific culture. Rather than a detailed, specific explanation of the freed slaves’ uprootedness through spoken exposition, McIntyre instead visualized the interplay of their characters and their given circumstances through the way they moved. Instead of hearing the story of their fate in her head, McIntyre saw the story. Consistent with D. Ball’s definition, McIntyre’s movement image conveys multiple connected meanings. The freed slaves’ personal and odd dance not only reflected their external unsettled circumstances, it also expressed their grounded inner convictions. McIntyre also likened their idiosyncratic movement style image to what she considers to be the idiosyncratic writing style of the story’s author, Toni Morrison.

Using images to tell a story is also evident in Mitchell’s thought process when he staged “Scrap” in The Full Monty, anchoring a group of unemployed union workers to metal chairs in a basement. Mitchell’s work on “Scrap” was previously introduced in Chapter 4’s discussion of analytical techniques for choreography. The example is reused here to make the point that Mitchell’s recollection of the number did not evoke any of the number’s lyrics, nor did he launch into a lengthy verbal explanation of any of the men’s feelings. Instead he colored his story through picturing the worker’s immobility, which he then contrasted with the image of clanging folding chairs that the men closed on their way out.

Images, likewise, infuse Taylor-Corbett’s thought process when she recently reviewed a new play about two estranged brothers brought together by their father’s death. Rather than verbalizing the, perhaps, complex relationship between the brothers, or
the brothers’ contradictory feelings towards their father, Taylor-Corbett, instead, saw the movement image of a toppling coffin that was apparently not indicated in the playwright’s stage directions. She explains:

The coffin was there . . . I just suddenly saw one brother push the other brother and flip over the coffin. And I don't know why those thoughts come to you but when you're a visual person, I think . . . ideas begin to permeate and I don't even know where [the push] would happen but there's a lot of angry exchanges so it's quite plausible. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

In addition to their highly developed visual acuity, choreographers are also trained to experience life and interpret art kinesthetically. Mitchell says, “[T]he way to show moves is incredibly important to me” (telephone interview). And Tharp writes, “I get a kick out of the sweat and rigor and sheer exertion of making my body move . . . Dancing, perhaps more than any other art form, has an energizing effect on people” (151).

Writing that choreographers have an affinity for movement is stating the obvious. However, in this discussion, it frames the concept that when choreographers read scripts, they often experience them as vehicles for movement compared with, for example, a literary person, who like Wallis and Shepherd might experience plays as intellectual debates of ideas and beliefs. It stands to reason, then, that a choreographer’s conversational vocabulary might reflect and embrace their visual, kinesthetic, or emotional responses. Although perhaps not intending to be anti-intellectual, their tone can sometimes come across that way. For example, Taylor-Corbett and Clarke often use the words “instinct” and “intuition,” which are antonyms of “knowledge” and
“reasoning.” Taylor-Corbett expresses, “I confess that my methods are instinctual. I read a script as though those characters are me. What would I do? How would I act? How can I manipulate them into a scenario that the audience will understand?” (personal email communication, 27 September 2008). And Clarke says, “I'm very intuitive and instinctive and I don't want to literally, I don't want to illustrate words. I would like to find the feeling about the words, rather than illustrating linearly narrative” (personal interview, 5 December 2008).

While Tharp loves dance, she also sees the passion for moving as a potential trap. “The sheer pleasure of working in the studio introduces the temptation to linger, to fall in love with the process of creation rather than driving toward the end product” (152). The “sheer pleasure” of moving sometimes interferes with a choreographer’s ability to connect his or her work to the overall picture. For example, Taylor-Corbett and composer Steven Sondheim envisioned two different pictures for a courtroom scene that she staged in *Merrily We Roll Along*. Taylor-Corbett assumed that she had been hired her for balletic narrative style, which, as it turned out, was incompatible with the more naturalistic style that Sondheim preferred. She clearly enjoyed the kinesthetic qualities in her own work and was flummoxed when Sondheim asked her to revise her staging to be more naturalistic. She recalls:

> Stephen Sondheim actually was there quite a lot, and I remember I staged this courtroom thing, which I thought was really rather exciting. The piece needed movement, it really, you know, cried out for it and after seeing it, I think Stephen said, “If you could just do this but not with the steps” . . .
was just like, “I don't understand what you want me to do!” (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

A love of dance can also tip the balance towards a choreographer’s ambition for his or her own work and away from the responsibility to serve the needs of the show. For instance, Gower Champion directed and choreographed *Pretty Belle*, which closed before it made it to Broadway. The production starred Angela Lansbury, who portrayed an alcoholic southern belle. Champion spent most of his time staging musical numbers as opposed to mining the psychological depths that were guiding this character-driven show (Long 208). Even Robbins, who held an iron “grasp” on the central theme of a show, was, nonetheless, sidetracked by his own passion for dance (Jowitt 174). Critic Deborah Jowitt called the pragmatic director side of Robbins the “show doctor” (174). This was the side of Robbins who scribbled in the margins of scripts, asking, “What is this scene really about?” (Robbins qtd. in Jowitt 174). Jowitt called the choreographer side the “creative wildfire” (174). This was the Robbins that compulsively tried to fit as much choreography as he could into the show. One example of his extraneous dance numbers that were eventually cut was the “Wild Man from the Mountain” ballet for the musical *Call Me Madam* (174), which began with the pretext of one onstage character describing some wild mountain people and then announcing, “Oh here they come now! . . . Oh, look, they’re starting to dance” (Valbor qtd. in Jowitt174).

Several choreographers explain how they adjusted to choreographing within the confines of a script. For instance, Patricia Birch says that when she is working with musicals:
It’s not like it’s a ballet where you’ve got full control of your vision and you’ve got this canvas and you’re going to paint. The difference between choreographing for concert [dance] and for theatre is that musical theatre at its best is a compromise. I mean that in a good sense. As the script changes, I’ll find myself adjusting numbers. In modern musical theatre you can’t stay rigid, at least I can’t, there are too many things influencing the moment (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 120).

And Joe Layton described how he adjusted:

Musicals have changed now. Everybody contributes and then it’s refined, and then you go for it. It doesn’t mean it’s going to work and if it doesn’t, the first thing that should bite the dust is the dance. If it doesn’t work, it can get in the way of the show . . . I won’t costume a dance number ‘til the very last because it’s so expensive and it can bite the dust at the last second. Those are the things that I’ve grown with, just by doing it more and more . . . I don’t fight anymore for my choreography. Years ago, you know doing my steps, doing my number, “Ooh, I have one less number. But it’s no more that, it’s the overall thing” (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 55-56).

Taylor-Corbett found equilibrium between her own kinesthetic sensibilities and the needs of the show when directing the musical My Vaudeville Man! about the life of eccentric tap dancer Jack Donahue. She and actor-dancer Shonn Wiley created an intricate routine for the opening dance number that was fun to choreograph and dance, but was not resonating with the audience. In response to a note from the theater’s artistic
director, they simplified the choreography in a way that made it appear virtuosic to the audience. Taylor-Corbett relates:

[The artistic director] said, “You're not doing anything simple enough for the audience to draw applause”... I instantly saw what he meant, didn't quite know how to fix it, worked with Shonn, Shonn and I talked about it, found something that... nine times out of ten works. It fulfills the audience because it's simple enough, it goes on for long enough, and we were just trying to be... too sophisticated... It has to look difficult to [the audience] even though to a tapper, it's not... it's [the character’s] first Vaudeville [dance] number [in the show],... so it's important... Jack Donahue is the father of all these, you know, great people so let's see what made people excited about him. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

The note that the artistic director gave to Taylor-Corbett was evidently quite helpful to her. It is perplexing, then, that, from the evidence, formal critical response techniques and protocols for choreography are not incorporated into the collaborative process. Interviewee responses indicate that choreography is analyzed and reviewed in a haphazard or casual manner. In addition, it appears that camaraderie and trust are prerequisites for the positive exchange of critical responses.

For example, Mitchell has had an enviable relationship with veteran director Jack O’Brien, with whom he staged Hairspray and The Full Monty. Mitchell says, “Jack O'Brien and I when we work together, it's like hand in glove... we could do either's work... it's really about the trust” (telephone interview). The trust seems to have been built during long preproduction periods. Mitchell explains, “[B]efore a Broadway show
goes into rehearsal. . . you've probably been working with your collaborators at least for a year” (telephone interview).

Most theater collaborators do not have a year within which to build trust and friendship. Sometimes they have to endure their work together when they do not even respect each other’s work. Taylor-Corbett candidly admits, “I have to confess that as a choreographer, I have never had a truly satisfying relationship with a director. Perhaps that is partly why I needed to become my own director. I think this is because what a choreographer does is so little [understood] by most directors” (personal email communication, 30 September 2008). Comments like these suggest missed opportunities for both the choreographer and the director. What a waste of creative resources to have a formidable talent such Taylor-Corbett in the room and not know how to talk her language. What a missed opportunity for Taylor-Corbett to not be able to further her dialog with Sondheim while working on *Merrily We Roll Along*. It is unfortunate that, as Lerman writes, techniques and protocols for critical response are so overlooked. If these mechanisms were in place, how many more helpful notes and insights from the artistic director, and others might have been aired? Without critical analytical skills and protocols, it seems that “intuition and politics” (Vandenbosch 3) take the attention away from the work at hand: staging the script.

McIntyre has recognized the lack of critical analytical skills and protocols in her own process. When working in theater, she has been impressed by the dialog between theater directors and dramaturgs, and laments that there is not a similar established, working relationship for choreographers. She explains, “Contemporary choreographers, they rarely are saying, ‘Oh, come in here and see my piece and tell me what you think
about it.’ It just–I don't know, it's just how we go” (personal interview, 3 December 2008). To address this, she has invited trusted mentors to respond to her several recent works. “That is something I've picked up from the theater world,” says McIntyre (personal interview, 3 December 2008).

In response to McIntyre’s comment that, “It’s just the way we go,” it might be worth examining why she perceives that it does go that way. What are some reasons that formalized techniques for critical response have not widely taken hold in professional environments? As covered in Chapter 4, Lavender has reported several common beliefs that prevent critical analysis from thriving in choreographic education. These are worth repeating because they apply to professional settings as well. One of these beliefs is that choreographers should assess their choreography through doing it and not analyzing it (55-56). Another assumption is that it’s the teacher’s or the director’s job to do the evaluating, not the choreographer’s (50-52). A third belief is that critical evaluation bruises egos and should be avoided (52-53).

I will add to Lavender’s list by noting that there is a tendency for some dancers to believe that choreographers’ skills are somewhat inexplicable and mystical. As already discussed, choreographers have highly developed visual and kinesthetic sensibilities, which, in cases like Taylor-Corbett and Clarke, influence their vocabulary. They often use words like “intuition” and “mystery.” Compared to Tharp and Mitchell, who prefer to toil away until they find a creative solution, the “intuitive” approach is, in contrast, much more romantic. This romantic attitude is not uncommon in the dance world, where choreographers and directors are believed by many to have a direct line to the mystery of creativity, and their insights are not to be questioned. This divine persona is reflected in
the intensity of Tudor, who, in the biographical documentary *Antony Tudor*, said, “What do I expect from my students? I suppose roughly the same thing that all teachers expect with their students, and all choreographers expect from the dancers they’re working on, which is that they should be treated as God.” This idea of artistic divinity is also reflected in common vocabulary in the dance culture where, for example, Robbins was “known among dancers as God” (Kelly 37). Tudor also said, “But of course if you are going to be God; you have to have all your children and treat them as children, which they are” (*Antony Tudor*). Sometimes this sense of power translated into abusive rehearsal behavior. Mitchell recalls, “I saw Jerry [Robbins] tear down a girl over a period of six months to the point she could have killed herself . . . [a]nd Michael [Bennett] once said to me that the problem with theater today was that human rights were creeping in” (Green). Aside from inexcusable abusive behavior, it is worth remembering Lavender’s caution that there is danger in assuming that a leader’s views are more valid than anyone else’s because the process is robbed of the benefits of vetting and examining the leader’s perspectives. If a choreographer believes that they must or aspires to act in any way like Robbins or Tudor and appear omniscient, then they might shy away from appearing fallible and, therefore, might avoid openly seeking valuable input and feedback.

Not only the choreographer, but also the steps that he or she creates can be perceived as sacrosanct, similar, perhaps, to how the words in Shakespearean plays are idolized by some literary scholars. The argument here is not that there is no merit to preserving great works of art. What is at issue is that when choreographers view their own work as sacred, it can interfere with their receptiveness to critical response and evaluation. And as Lavender points out, without analysis and evaluation, closure might
occur before the revision process has had a chance to fully unfold. Not all choreographers are like this. Balanchine, for example, would sometimes re-choreograph a role to suit the qualities of the dancer who was presently performing it.

Related to the sanctity of steps, McIntyre brings up an interesting point about how concert dance programs, especially contemporary dance programs, have shorter performance schedules when compared to runs of musicals or plays. She says:

I like that the people [in theater] could perform their works for four weeks at least, every day for four weeks. . . . I see the people become just so brilliant . . . day after day, they get stronger and stronger . . . In dance, we do four days [of] performance [that] you rehearse for two months.

(personal interview, 3 December 2008)

Her perception is that the proportion of rehearsal time to performance time tends to be significantly greater in concert dance than musicals and plays. It might be interesting to gather more data on the effects of this time allotment. Acknowledging that my study does not have this additional data, it is, nonetheless, not unreasonable to say that choreographic features can become more set the longer the choreography is rehearsed. Attention to detail and fastidiousness can also increase with time. As the sequence of steps and how they are executed become more ingrained and fixed, a tolerance for revisions may decline.

All of the choreographers interviewed testified to the existence and benefits of informally vetting of ideas, and staging work through discussion, long preproduction, and preview periods, even though there is virtually no evidence of formal critical analytical work. In a 2002 forum on director choreographer collaboration, the participating
choreographers and directors agreed that good communication was an essential ingredient to any working relationship. The fact that they were discussing what should be held for conventional wisdom indicates that constructive communication is not nearly as prevalent in collaborative relationships as they would like it to be. For example, choreographer Joey McKneely emphasized, “I have found that the lack of communication between a director and a choreographer ultimately hurts a show quite a bit. I think it’s really important that directors speak to their choreographers a lot and in great detail” (“Shall We Dance” 36). He adds:

I’ve worked on shows where I saw the director once before rehearsals. Then, during rehearsal, I saw him probably three times. Consequently, my work suffered because I wasn’t on the same wavelength as him. On the other hand, there have been times when I’ve seen the director every day for three weeks before rehearsal. And it shows when we go into rehearsal because we’ve been communicating. We have a language already. (“Shall We Dance” 36)

It is also not uncommon for choreographers to work with co-choreographers, dance assistants, or a small, ad hoc group of dancers to experiment with ideas before rehearsals even begin. For instance, Michael Bennett always used a co-choreographer. He admitted, “I work better with a co-choreographer, especially one who is strong in all the things I’m not, so that we make, together, one great choreographer.” (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 107) and of his long-standing collaboration with choreographer Bob Avian, Bennett said, “It’s like we rehearse each other” (qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 108). Bob Fosse worked by himself for weeks in studio, then with
assistants for a few more weeks before starting rehearsals with a full cast (Field qtd. in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister 86). And Jerry Mitchell has worked out elaborate dances such as the birdcage number in Le Cage aux Folles before beginning full rehearsals. Mitchell describes what he suggested to director Jerry Zaks:

“I'd like to start with a bird in cage, and all the other Cagelles in red." And I sort of explained it to him and showed him some pictures that I'd collected and drawings and he said, "Well, get to work, let me see what you got. That sounds fabulous." I got a cage. I got in a room with eight dancers . . . I created the Can-Can with those eight dancers. (telephone interview)

This informal vetting of ideas and experimentation, however casual and unplanned, provides opportunities for analysis and experimentation. The point is, however, that many choreographers may not have the budget or the time to hire an assistant, co-choreographer, or ad-hoc dance troupe. In this light, a well-planned critical response session might be a good compromise. A well-planned critical response session could be less costly than hiring an assistant while still providing opportunities to vet the work. If critical response procedures are designed well, their structure might substitute somewhat for the lack of camaraderie and tight control over who is evaluating the work.

In contrast to the careful planning of Bennett, Avian, Mitchell, and Fosse, Clarke’s process does not rely heavily on preproduction. Clarke admits, “I don't go in with some architecture plan about how to do it . . . I'm not somebody who's kind of uber-organized . . . I'm truest to myself and ultimately to what work will be created if I don't put a lot of pressure, intellectual pressure, on myself . . . I actually believe in the moment,
in living in the moment (personal interview, 5 December 2008). Instead, Clarke seems to combine her conceptualizing, creating, staging, and evaluation simultaneously so that the dancers and actors go into rehearsal with her as she attempts to do all of this at the same time. It is almost as if she does all her preproduction and staging work with her actors and collaborators in the rehearsal room so that the entire cast goes through script analysis and vetting together. Not surprisingly, this collaborative staging process is, at times, ponderous for her and her cast. For example, during a four-month rehearsal process for her multi-disciplinary theatrical work *Vienna: Lusthaus*, Clarke recounts, “I had a six-week creative paralysis during which I was numb. People threatened to quit. I have an easy disposition but when I run dry, I'm dry” (qtd. in Bartow 63).

In addition to sharing her former teacher’s painstakingly slow creative process, Clarke also has Tudor’s propensity for careful observation through which she patiently mines the behavior and basic emotional interplay of the performers. She notes:

> I see some people do something interesting, I'll just stop. Let's look at that again and explore it and then it may take a little bit of time to see that it has a life that needs mutual discovery both from me and the performers . . . I tend to use my eyes for response and not literal response . . . I'm more like an animal . . . I think more like a baby, I think kind of color, space, shape, hunger, tired, I have to go to the bathroom, need to eat. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

She relies on the cast improvising and experimenting until they chance upon something that works. This labor- and time-intensive process requires trust, patience, and confidence. She explains:
[This] means that in my work, I need to make an atmosphere of complete safety for the performers so they don't judge themselves and I don't judge them. To get to the purity of expression that I look for means a very free, safe environment [and] that the work is discovered through playfulness and not through analysis . . . I've worked with some great actors and they like to improvise. They'll take a text that they're working on and they'll just, you know, sometimes they'll do it like wind and sometimes they'll do it in a tiny little voice and sometimes–I help them like a sheepdog with a herd of sheep. I'm there just to keep them from breaking their legs so to speak and just to protect them. But I give them enormous freedom to play a scene, to run a scene four, five, six, seven times in a rehearsal to see where the life and the rhythm of the scene is . . . I inform them, I'll have a comment, they inform me, it's a dialog. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

The constant exchange in Clarke’s collaborative process has similarities to the dialog that Lavender and co-authors Lerman and Borstel suggest for critical analysis and evaluation. Critical analysis and evaluation seems to be threaded throughout Clarke’s rehearsal process. The interchange between the performers is not always verbal and intellectual but is, rather, a dialog that mixes verbal cues with movement and visual images. The performers create in a loose structure that will ultimately produce staging that might be quite formal in its design.

Clarke has an unusually high tolerance for unstructured creative processes, and she expects the same from her cast. She says, “[T]he actors and dancers have to search as
much as I do. We’re all children dropped on another planet at the beginning of this process and, tentatively, hand-in-hand, we find our way through this mire to whatever” (qtd. in Bartow 58-59). But even she has tested her limits. For instance, she directed *Kaos*, which consisted of several Pirandello short stories staged in Italian. Clarke recalls, “I had them improvise for a long time. And it was really the most chaotic rehearsal process I’ve ever been in because my Italian is pretty bad and I was working with people whose grasp on English was minimal” (personal interview, 5 December 2008). During this rehearsal process, she was actually hospitalized for heart fibrillation. While staging an actor in a grave scene, she became quite distressed. She says, “I actually had what appeared to be a heart attack while I was standing in the coffin” (personal interview, 5 December 2008).

Not all choreographers share Clarke’s tolerance for incertitude, nor do they always work with people who are as brave as her to forge ahead without a plan. She admits, “A performer has to feel confident that they can bring as much to the plate as I’m bringing to the plate” (personal interview, 5 December 2008). In addition to not having Clarke’s temperament, not all choreographers have the luxury of a four-month rehearsal period and the time to run a scene up to seven times until a satisfactory interpretation emerges. In light of the scarcity of time and patience, two questions arise. Can the insights gained through thoughtful critical methods be as instructive and provocative, as those arrived at after exploring every alternative? If not, considering that applying analytical methods might save time, can the insights that they provide be at least a good compromise? In contemplating a similar business question, Vandenbosch writes that an organization may opt for the solution that fixes only 80% of the business problem at
hand, if the solution can be implemented in less time, or with less risk (126-127).

Similarly, in creative environments an 80% or even a 60% solution might be a satisfactory outcome, especially when a choreographer is often working under time constraints and with people they do not know.

Clarke seems to exclusively create through experimenting, trial and error, and dialog. She says, “[T]hat[,] to me[,] is the nature of work. I don't know how to work in any other way” (personal interview, 5 December 2008). Although not exclusively, Mitchell also puts faith in experimenting, risking the unknown in order to move a process forward, even when his collaborators may not have full confidence in his ideas. He says:

I always have this philosophy. Look we should try the new way because what we've got doesn't seem to be right. And if it doesn't work, we'll keep trying but we can always go back to what we have. There's no harm in trying something new. Ultimately, you're fishing—you're always fishing for the perfect beat, the perfect answer to that, that perfect piece of the puzzle and, you know, I think that's probably what everybody goes through as a collaborator. (telephone interview)

Mitchell believes in not pre-editing and fearlessly sharing ideas in preproduction. He advises:

I usually write ideas that pop into my head. Whatever comes, I write it down, I make a note of it, I go back and share it. It doesn't mean that it's going to go into the script; it doesn't mean that it's going to change it but it's a place to start collaborating, it's a place for discussion. Harvey Feinstein and I are working on a show, which I can't really name yet, but
he did a first draft and, of course, from that first draft, we started discussing things. And I said, "I have this crazy idea. I don't know if it's a good idea or a bad idea," and I told it to him and he loved the idea . . . So my point is that if you don't share it, you'll never know. (telephone interview)

Along with preproduction and the rehearsal process itself, preview performances for audiences are also crucial for feedback. McIntyre admires the preview editing process in theater, which is not a concert dance convention. She says, “I've learned how in theater . . . you have previews where you're switching--where you're changing things . . . And how the director can be so bold to maybe cut out a whole section or shift . . . the whole energy of something completely because they're doing it in front of an audience” (personal interview, 3 December 2008).

Working in theater, Taylor-Corbett also values the insights gained through audience response through preview evaluation. She comments:

I think my biggest kind of growth as a person is sitting in the previews, trusting the audience, and making changes based on what they're not getting. Whether it's a laugh or you feel that they're not in tune with the character. And being able to not be traumatized by it but to be able to turn it immediately around the following day . . . with the writers, and try to meet it head on. . . . When you're looking at the rehearsal, this is going well, nothing fell down, the dancing's fairly good, the band is together . . . You're looking at so many things that sometimes you don't see the forest for the trees. And the audience tells you what the forest looks like . . .
What's the superfluous that can go here? They're hearing too much information, . . . they're not hearing enough information and . . . that is just a bloody hard process. But I think that's [what] separates the men from the boys for me is that preview period, check and preview period. It's no longer a theory, it's a reality. (personal interview, 5 December 2008)

In summary, this chapter attempted to provide some practical context and application for the theories discussed in the previous chapters. Three common characteristics of choreographers were highlighted: they work hard, they work visually, and they work kinesthetically. These characteristics can be seen as virtues and often serve a theatrical production well, but, when misapplied, they can interfere with a choreographer’s ability to relate their work to the interconnected whole. Some of the issues that surfaced were that “reading hard” sometimes substitutes for “reading smart.” In addition, a choreographer’s gift for working with images and movement can add rich visual and kinesthetic qualities to a production but, when misused, can interfere with other elements such as complex language and detailed, specific character development.

There was scant evidence of either systematic script-reading techniques or protocols for critical response to choreography. Because there is little evidence of these kinds of analytical and evaluative protocols, it follows that the pitfalls and misjudgments associated with the unexamined critical assumptions might continue to occur unmitigated. As Boas wrote, it takes concerted effort and education to accept that our own biases do not represent those of the whole (qtd. in Lavender 56). Choreographers are accustomed to hard work. In the course of my research, the question continues to arise –
what would happen if some of their hard work was applied to learning something as intellectual but really rather practical as critical-response techniques?
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY

My research set out to consider the ways in which script analysis and the development of choreography might interact, and what might be the benefits of this interaction. Similarly, another aim was to document what methodologies exist for analyzing choreography, and what might be the benefits of these analytical activities to choreographers and their collaborators.

Through exploring elements of script analysis, such as conflict-resolution structures, and reviewing basic choreographic principles, more similarities emerged than differences. The functions of a script’s dramatic elements and the functions of choreographic elements appear to be more enmeshed than disconnected.

Furthermore, the critical analytical processes of Schönberg, Lavender, and co-authors Lerman and Borstel illustrate that thoughtful and accessible methodologies exist for responding to choreography. These methods appear, to me, to be so practical that it is somewhat surprising that their use was not found by this research to be more widespread in professional environments.

Through interviewing four choreographers and reviewing published accounts of choreographers and their work, common characteristics and issues emerged. Choreographers work hard, they work kinesthetically, and they work with visual images. Problems (e.g., choreographers creating movement that does not serve the needs of a show) might be mitigated if script-reading techniques and protocols for reviewing choreography were to be incorporated into the collaborative process.

Without such techniques and practical methods for mining not only the mechanics but also the poetry of both scripts and choreography, time and good ideas are lost. As
Mitchell says, when ideas are not aired, one will never know if they are good or not. Adding to Mitchell’s advice, I maintain that if one’s ideas are neither well-articulated nor well received, one may also not realize their full potential. Therefore, my research strongly suggests that command of dramatic and choreographic concepts facilitates the expression of creative vision and critical response to work in progress. In addition, my research advises that the communication of critical analysis and evaluation is greatly enhanced when it is conducted in well-structured forums.

Rather than be restrictive, several choreographers testify to the freedom that preparation and research provide. Graciela Daniele says, “The more prepared I am, the more I can loosen up and throw away an idea and just go. I don’t think I could do that if I was not prepared” (qtd. in Lodge 250). And Broadway choreographer Kathleen Marshall says, “I think actually, when you are not prepared, then you get frazzled and it’s hard to take in new ideas” (qtd. in Lodge 249). And as Patricia Birch puts it, “Logic is what gives you the freedom to be dramatic, astonishing or whatever it is” (qtd. in Lodge 139). While application of script-reading techniques and protocols for critical response to choreography appear on the surface to be cerebral and intellectual, I believe that sound analytical practices can potentially yield more time and generate new ideas for further intuitive, instinctual, creative pursuits.
APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHIES OF INTERVIEWED CHOREOGRAPHERS

Martha Clarke

Martha Clarke was a founding member of Pilobolus Dance Theatre. She has choreographed for the Nederlans Dans Theater, American Ballet Theatre, and Rambert Dance Company. Clarke directed original productions including Garden of Earthly Delights, Vienna Lusthaus, Miracolo d’amore, Endangered Species, An Uncertain Hour, The Hungry Artist and Ver la flame. Other directing credits include Alice’s Adventures Underground at the Royal National Theatre in London, A Midsummer Night’s Dream at American Repertory Theatre, The Magic Flute and Cosi fan tutte for the Glimmerglass Opera and the Canadian Opera Company, respectively. She directed and created Belle Epoque for the Lincoln Center Theatre. Her awards include the Drama Desk Award, two Obie Awards, the L.A. Critics Award, and a Tony Randall Foundation Award (“Who’s Who in the Cast” PlayBill: Minetta Lane Theatre 36).

Jerry Mitchell

Legally Blonde marked Jerry Mitchell’s Broadway directing debut. He also choreographed the Broadway production of La Cage aux Folles, for which he received the Tony Award and Drama Desk Award. His other Broadway choreography credits include Hairspray, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, The Full Monty, Never Gonna Dance, Imaginary Friends and revivals of Gypsy, The Rocky Horror Show, and You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown. His choreography for TV includes The Drew Carey Show. His film choreography credits include In & Out, Camp, Drop Dead Gorgeous, Scent of a Woman,
and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Mitchell also directs *Broadway Bares* for Broadway Cares (“Who’s Who in the Cast” *Playbill: Neil Simon Theatre 28*).

**Dianne McIntyre**

McIntyre holds a BFA in Dance from The Ohio State University, and was founder and artistic director of the New York dance/music ensemble Sounds in Motion from 1972 to 1988. McIntyre has choreographed for more than 30 plays, including *Mule Bone* and the Broadway production of *King Hedley I, Spell #7, Miss Evers’ Boys, Polk County,* and *Crowns*. Her TV choreography includes HBO movie *Miss Evers’ Boys, Langston Hughes: The Dreamkeeper*, and *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*. Her choreography was also featured in the film *Beloved*. She has co-created, directed, and choreographed theatre/dance pieces *In Living Color: a Gullah Story, Blues Rooms for Theatre of the First Amendment, I Could Stop on a Dime and Get Ten Cents Change,* and *Open the Door, Virginia!*, and has choreographed for dance companies Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Repertory Ensemble, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, and Dayton Contemporary Dance Company.

McIntyre has been awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts Three-Year Choreographers Fellowship, the National Dance Residency Award through Pew Charitable Trust, and National Choreography Grant through New England Foundation for the Arts. Other awards include two Bessie Awards (New York Dance and Performance Award), AUDELCO Award (NY Black Theatre), AUDELCO Pioneer Award, Helen Hayes Award (DC theatre), and three Helen Hayes nominations as well as the Thelma Hill Award and the Woodie Award, both for lifetime achievement (http://www.diannemcintyre.com/).
Lynne Taylor-Corbett

Taylor-Corbett directed and choreographed the Broadway production of Swing!, for which she received two Tony nominations. Other Broadway credits include Chess and Titanic. Off Broadway, she directed My Vaudeville Man!, Theda Bera and the Frontier Rabbi, Women on the Verge, Darlene Love: Portrait of a Singer, 20th Century Pop, and Cookin. Regional shows include Tintypes at Hartford Stage and The Old Globe, Opal at George Street Playhouse and The Lyric Theatre, Flight of the Lawnchair Man for the Goodspeed Opera House, Hats in Chicago, and Girl’s Room in Los Angeles.

She has choreographed for New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Hubbard Street Dance Company, and Pacific Northwest Ballet, among others. She is the resident guest choreographer of The Carolina Ballet (http://www.lynnetaylorcorbett.com/lynnetaylor-corbett_bio.html).
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions were emailed to the participants prior to their interviews. Clarke, McIntyre, and Taylor-Corbett opted to be interviewed in person, Mitchell by telephone. Taylor-Corbett chose to email some of her responses. All participants responded to questions in an open-ended, conversational manner.

1. When you are choreographing for a show that has a script, how do you familiarize yourself with the script?

2. Do you have a defined process for how you read a script? If so, please describe this process and how it might affect your choreographic creative process and choices.

3. When you are creating movement for a show that has scripted spoken word, do you or your collaborators look at, discuss, review, and/or evaluate the choreography? If so, please describe this choreographic review and evaluation, and what the outcomes might be. Please describe how it compares with any process of studying the script and how these two might interact.

4. As you study the script, what do you look for in the script that might suggest to you the emphasis of structured crafted movement? How might these ideas be brought to life?

5. If you study the script, what in this process might suggest to you that structured movement is not needed?

6. As you look at and reflect upon the choreography, what about the properties of the choreography suggest that it can be enhanced through text? How might this come about?
7. How does your reading of the text and/or review of the choreography interplay with your perceived range of artistic freedom?
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